

1 TERMINAL WITH MULTIPLE AUDIO AND VIDEO

2 Related Applications

3 This application is a Divisional of Application Serial No. 08/160,194 filed on
4 December 2, 1993, which a continuation-in-part of application Serial Number 07/991,074
5 filed December 9, 1992 entitled TELEVISION PROGRAM PACKAGING AND
6 DELIVERY SYSTEM WITH MENU DRIVEN SUBSCRIBER ACCESS.

7 Parent application Serial No. 07/991,074 filed December 9, 1992 is incorporated
8 herein by reference.

9 The following continuation-in-part applications, also based on the above-
10 referenced patent application, are also incorporated herein by reference:

11 U.S. Patent No. 5,798,785 (Ser. No. 08/160,281), entitled REPROGRAMMABLE
12 TERMINAL FOR SUGGESTING PROGRAMS OFFERED ON A TELEVISION
13 PROGRAM DELIVERY SYSTEM, filed on December 2, 1993;

14 U.S. Patent No. 5,600,364 (Ser. No. 08/160,280), entitled NETWORK
15 CONTROLLER FOR CABLE TELEVISION DELIVERY SYSTEMS, filed on
16 December 2, 1993;

17 U.S. Patent No. 5,659,350 (Ser. No. 08/160,282), entitled AN OPERATIONS
18 CENTER FOR A TELEVISION PROGRAM PACKAGING AND DELIVERY
19 SYSTEM, filed on December 2, 1993;

20 U.S. Patent No. 5,734,853 (Ser. No. 08/160,193), entitled SET TOP TERMINAL
21 FOR CABLE TELEVISION DELIVERY SYSTEMS, filed on December 2, 1993;

22 U.S. Patent No. 5,682,195 (Ser. No. 08/160,283), entitled DIGITAL CABLE
23 HEADEND FOR CABLE TELEVISION DELIVERY SYSTEM, filed on December 2,
24 1993.

1 Technical Field

2 The invention relates to television entertainment systems for providing television
3 programming to consumer homes. More particularly, the invention relates to a set top
4 terminal that provides multiple audio and video capability.

5 Background Of The Invention

6 Advances in television entertainment have been primarily driven by
7 breakthroughs in technology. In 1939, advances on Vladmir Zworykin's picture tube
8 provided the stimulus for NBC to begin its first regular broadcasts. In 1975, advances
9 in satellite technology provided consumers with increased programming to homes.

10 Many of these technology breakthroughs have produced inconvenient systems for
11 consumers. One example is the ubiquitous three remote control home, having a separate
12 and unique remote control for the TV, cable box and VCR. More recently, technology
13 has provided cable users in certain parts of the country with 100 channels of
14 programming. This increased program capacity is beyond the ability of many consumers
15 to use effectively. No method of managing the program choices has been provided to
16 consumers.

17 Consumers are demanding that future advances in television entertainment,
18 particularly programs and program choices, be presented to the consumer in a user
19 friendly manner. Consumer preferences, instead of technological breakthroughs, will
20 drive the television entertainment market for at least the next 20 years. As computer
21 vendors have experienced a switch from marketing new technology in computer hardware
22 to marketing better usability, interfaces and service, the television entertainment industry
23 will also experience a switch from new technology driving the market to consumer
24 usability driving the market.

25 Consumers want products incorporating new technology that are useful, and will
26 no longer purchase new technology for the sake of novelty or status. Technological
27 advances in sophisticated hardware are beginning to surpass the capability of the average

1 consumer to use the new technology. Careful engineering must be done to make
2 entertainment products incorporating new technology useful and desired by consumers.

3 In order for new television entertainment products to be successful, the products
4 must satisfy consumer demands. TV consumers wish to go from limited viewing choices
5 to a variety of choices, from no control of programming to complete control. Consumers
6 wish to advance from cumbersome and inconvenient television to easy and convenient
7 television and keep costs down. Consumers do not wish to pay for one hundred channels
8 when due to lack of programming information, they seldom, if ever, watch programming
9 on many of these channels.

10 Summary Of Invention

11 The present invention is a set top terminal for a television program delivery
12 system. The set top terminal is a key component of a digital television program delivery
13 system. The set top terminal is an ungradable component that provides for the
14 decompression of multiple digital program signals. The set top terminal also provides
15 a menu generation capability and a number of other advanced features and functional
16 capabilities.

17 The set top terminal may be achieved through a set of hardware upgrades to: (1)
18 an existing set top converter upgraded with a circuit card (which has a microprocessor
19 electronically connected to the set top converter); (2) an industry standard decompression
20 converter ungradable by either an upgrade module or a menu generation card; (3) a set
21 top converter box capable of both decompression and menu generation; and (4) a digital
22 television. The hardware upgrades provide additional advanced features and functional
23 capabilities to any of these embodiments.

24 To provide multiple video, the terminal includes two or more terminals and
25 associated digital signal processing components. The multiple video signals can be
26 displayed on a television in a multi-window format (e.g., side-by-side) or in an overlay
27 fashion. Each video signal may have an associated audio signal. A subscriber can select
28 which audio signal to hear using a switch that may be operated remotely using a remote
29 control.

1 The multiple video signals may also be provided to different televisions. For
2 example, a first program may be provided to a first television and a second program may
3 be provided to a second television that may be located in a room different from that have
4 the first television and the set top terminal.

5 The multiple audio feature also allows a subscriber to select one of several
6 languages for the audio presentation. The available languages may be listed in an on-
7 screen menu, and the subscriber chooses the desired language using the remote control.

8 The set top terminal also supports a TV guide service, which provides subscribers
9 with information on all programming available at its particular subscriber location. The
10 set top terminal further includes the capability of querying viewers to establish, among
11 other things, favorite channel lists, personal profile data and mood information. The set
12 top terminal allows the subscriber to view promotional menus on future programming
13 events.

14 The set top terminal supports additional capabilities using its hardware upgrades
15 that allow subscribers to use other interactive services, for example, to engage in on-line
16 question and answer sessions, to order and confirm airline tickets, and to access a variety
17 of other data services. The set top terminal makes use of a digital tuner as a hardware
18 upgrade to provide subscribers with a digital audio capability.

19 The set top terminal may be used to control video tape machines, thereby
20 simplifying the recording of programs. The set top terminal can, in conjunction with the
21 program delivery system, easily support high definition television (HDTV). For
22 subscribers living in remote locations, the set top terminal accommodates backyard
23 satellite systems. In addition to all the features that the set top terminal supports with its
24 current internal programming and upgrade ability, additional features may be added or
25 existing features increased through remote reprogramming of the set top terminal.

26 Description Of The Drawings

27 Figure 1 is a diagram of the primary components of the television delivery system.

28 Figure 2 is an overview of the television delivery system operations.

29 Figure 3 is a schematic of the operation of the primary components of the system.

1 Figure 4 is a block diagram of the hardware components of the set top terminal.

2 Figure 5a is a perspective front view of a set top terminal.

3 Figure 5b is a perspective rear view of a set top terminal.

4 Figure 6 is a schematic of a Turbo Card upgrade for a set top terminal.

5 Figure 7a is a drawing of a frame format for program control information signal.

6 Figure 7b is a drawing of a frame format for a polling response from the set top
7 terminal.

8 Figure 8 is a drawing of the basic menus used in the present invention, including
9 the ten major menus represented by icons.

10 Figure 9a is a schematic of a basic decompression box with upgrade module and
11 associated connections.

12 Figure 9b is a schematic of an alternative embodiment of a simple decompression
13 box with upgrade module and associated connections.

14 Figure 10 is a more detailed block diagram of the components of a simple
15 decompression box with upgrade module.

16 Figure 11 is a schematic of the set top terminal's upstream data transmission
17 hardware.

18 Figure 12a is a schematic showing the components of the Level A, B, and C
19 hardware upgrades.

20 Figure 12b is a schematic showing the components of the Level D hardware
21 upgrade.

22 Figure 13a is a schematic showing the two parts of a remote control unit.

23 Figure 13b is a drawing of the preferred remote control unit.

24 Figure 14 is a diagram of the components of a set top terminal having a picture-
25 on-picture capability.

26 Figure 15 is a drawing of a menu related to program catalogue services.

27 Figures 16a through 16d are drawings of viewer querying and mood question
28 menus.

1 Figures 17a and 17b are drawings of the set top terminal hardware components
2 that accommodate transparent channel switching.

3 Figure 18 is a drawing of an interactive television promotional menu for a set top
4 terminal hardware upgrade.

5 Figures 19a and 19b are drawings of submenus for interactive television services
6 using hardware upgrade Level A.

7 Figures 20a through 20d are drawings of interactive services using hardware
8 upgrade Level B, which are related to on-screen airline reservations.

9 Figure 21 is a drawing of a menu for digital audio services.

10 Figure 22 is a drawing of a menu related to program guide services.

11 Figure 23 is a drawing of a menu related to high definition television (HDTV)
12 programming.

13 Detailed Description Of The Preferred Embodiment

14 A. Television Program Delivery System Description

15 1. Introduction

16 Figure 1 shows the present invention as part of an expanded cable television
17 program delivery system 200 that dramatically increases programming capacity using
18 compressed transmission of television program signals. Developments in digital
19 bandwidth compression technology now allow much greater throughput of television
20 program signals over existing or slightly modified transmission media. The program
21 delivery system 200 shown provides subscribers with a user friendly interface to operate
22 and exploit a six-fold or more increase in current program delivery capability

23 Subscribers are able to access an expanded television program package and view
24 selected programs through a menu-driven access scheme that allows each subscriber to
25 select individual programs by sequencing a series of menus. The menus are sequenced
26 by the subscriber using simple alpha-numeric and iconic character access or moving a
27 cursor or highlight bar on the TV screen to access desired programs by simply pressing
28 a single button, rather than recalling from memory and pressing the actual two or more
29 digit numeric number assigned to a selection. Thus, with the press of a single button, the

1 subscriber can advance from one menu to the next. In this fashion, the subscriber can
2 sequence the menus and select a program from any given menu. The programs are
3 grouped by category so that similar program offerings are found on the same menu.

4 In one embodiment, it is a system to provide a subscriber interactive services with
5 a remotely located computer using a series of individual menus, comprising means for
6 generating menu control information in digitally compressed form; means for
7 transmitting the digitally compressed menu control information; a television terminal for
8 displaying menus on a television comprising a decompressor for decompressing the menu
9 control information; a menu generator for generating menus from the menu control
10 information; a means for interactively entering information using generated menus;
11 means for communicating with the remotely located computer; means for receiving data
12 from the remotely located computer; and means for integrating the data into menus.

13 2. Major System Components

14 In its most basic form, the system uses a program delivery system 200 in
15 conjunction with a conventional concatenated cable television system 210. The program
16 delivery system 200 generally includes (i) at least one operations center 202, where
17 program packaging and control information are created and then assembled in the form
18 of digital data, (ii) a digital compression system, where the digital data is compressed,
19 combined/multiplexed, encoded, and mapped into digital signals for satellite transmission
20 to the cable headend 208, and (iii) a set of in-home decompressors. The program delivery
21 system 200 transports the digital signals to the cable headend 208 where the signals are
22 transmitted through a concatenated cable television system 210. Within the cable
23 headend 208, the received signals may be decoded, demultiplexed, managed by a local
24 central distribution and switching mechanism, combined and then transmitted to the set
25 top terminal 220 located in each subscriber's home over the cable system 210. Although
26 concatenated cable systems 210 are the most prevalent transmission media to the home,
27 telephone lines, cellular networks, fiber optics, Personal Communication Networks and
28 similar technology for transmitting to the home can be used interchangeably with this
29 program delivery system 200.

1 The delivery system 200 has a reception region 207 with an in-home
2 decompression capability. This capability is performed by a decompressor housed within
3 a set top terminal 220 in each subscriber's home. The decompressor remains transparent
4 from the subscriber's point of view and allows any of the compressed signals to be
5 demultiplexed and individually extracted from the composite data stream and then
6 individually decompressed upon selection by the subscriber. The decompressed video
7 signals are converted into analog signals for television display. Such analog signals
8 include NTSC formatted signals for use by a standard television. Control signals are
9 likewise extracted and decompressed and then either executed immediately or placed in
10 local storage such as a RAM. Multiple sets of decompression hardware may be used to
11 decompress video and control signals. The set top terminal 220 may then overlay or
12 combine different signals to form the desired display on the subscriber's television.
13 Graphics on video or picture-on-picture are examples of such a display.

14 Although a single digital compression standard (e.g., MPEG) may be used for
15 both the program delivery system 200 and the concatenated cable system 210, the
16 compression technique used may differ between the two systems. When the compression
17 standards differ between the two media, the signals received by the cable headend 208
18 must be decompressed before transmission from the headend 208 to the set top terminals
19 220. Subsequently, the cable headend 208 must recompress and transmit the signals to
20 the set top terminal 220, which would then decompress the signals using a specific
21 decompression algorithm.

22 The video signals and program control signals received by the set top terminal
23 220 correspond to specific television programs and menu selections that each subscriber
24 may access through a subscriber interface. The subscriber interface is a device with
25 buttons located on the set top terminal 220 or on a portable remote control 900. In the
26 preferred system embodiment, the subscriber interface is a combined alpha-character,
27 numeric and iconic remote control device 900, which provides direct or menu-driven
28 program access. The preferred subscriber interface also contains cursor movement and
29 go buttons as well as alpha, numeric and iconic buttons. This subscriber interface and

1 menu arrangement enables the subscriber to sequence through menus by choosing from
2 among several menu options that are displayed on the television screen. In addition, a
3 user may bypass several menu screens and immediately choose a program by selecting
4 the appropriate alpha-character, numeric or iconic combinations on the subscriber
5 interface. In the preferred embodiment, the set top terminal 220 generates the menus that
6 are displayed on the television by creating arrays of particular menu templates, and the
7 set top terminal 220 displays a specific menu or submenu option for each available video
8 signal.

9 3. Operations Center and Digital Compression System

10 The operations center 202 performs two primary services, packaging television
11 programs and generating the program control information signal. At the operations center
12 202, television programs are received from external program sources in both analog and
13 digital form. Figure 2 shows an embodiment of the operations center receiving signals
14 from various external sources 212. Examples of the external program sources are
15 sporting events, children's programs, specialty channels, news or any other program
16 source that can provide audio or visual signals. Once the programs are received from the
17 external program sources, the operations center 202 digitizes (and preferably compresses)
18 any program signals received in analog form. The operations center 202 may also
19 maintain an internal storage of programs. The internally stored programs may be in
20 analog or digital form and stored on permanent or volatile memory sources, including
21 magnetic tape or RAM. Subsequent to receiving programming, the operations center 202
22 packages the programs into the groups and categories which provide the optimal
23 marketing of the programs to subscribers. For example, the operations center 202 may
24 package the same programs into different categories and menus for weekday, prime-time
25 viewing and Saturday afternoon viewing. Also, the operations center 202 packages the
26 television programs in a manner that enables both the various menus to easily represent
27 the programs and the subscribers to easily access the programs through the menus.

1 The packaging of the digital signals is typically performed at the operations center
2 202 by computer assisted packaging equipment (CAP). The CAP system normally
3 includes at least one computer monitor, keyboard, mouse, and standard video editing
4 equipment. A programmer packages the signals by entering certain information into the
5 CAP. This information includes the date, time slot, and program category of the various
6 programs. The programmer and the CAP utilize demographic data and ratings in
7 performing the packaging tasks. After the programmer selects the various programs from
8 a pool of available programs and inputs the requisite information, the programmer, with
9 assistance from the CAP, can select the price and allocate transponder space for the
10 various programs. After the process is complete, the CAP displays draft menus or
11 program schedules that correspond to the entries of the programmer. The CAP may also
12 graphically display allocation of transponder space. The programmer may edit the menus
13 and transponder allocation several times until satisfied with the programming schedule.
14 During the editing, the programmer may direct the exact location of any program name
15 on a menu with simple commands to the CAP.

16 The packaging process also accounts for any groupings by satellite transponder
17 which are necessary. The operations center 202 may send different groups of programs
18 to different cable headends 208 and/or set top terminals 220. One way the operations
19 center 202 may accomplish this task is to send different program packages to each
20 transponder. Each transponder, or set of transponders, then relays a specific program
21 package to specific cable headends 208 and/or set top terminals 220. The allocation of
22 transponder space is an important task performed by the operations center 202.

23 The operations center 202 may also "insert" directions for filling local available
24 program time in the packaged signal to enable local cable and television companies to fill
25 the program time with local advertising and/or local programming. Consequently, the
26 local cable headends 208 are not constrained to show only programs transmitted from the
27 operations center 202. New set top converters will incorporate both digital and analog
28 channels. Therefore, the cable headend 208 may combine analog signals with the digital
29 signals prior to transmitting the program signals to the set top terminals 220.

1 After the CAP packages the programs, it creates a program control information
2 signal to be delivered with the program package to the cable headend 208 and/or set top
3 terminal 220. The program control information signal contains a description of the
4 contents of the program package, commands to be sent to the cable headend 208 and/or
5 set top terminal 220, and other information relevant to the signal transmission.

6 In addition to packaging the signal, the operations center 202 employs digital
7 compression techniques to increase existing satellite transponder capacity by at least a 4:1
8 ratio, resulting in a four-fold increase in program delivery capability. A number of digital
9 compression algorithms currently exist which can achieve the resultant increase in
10 capacity and improved signal quality desired for the system. The algorithms generally
11 use one or more of three basic digital compression techniques: (1) within-frame
12 (intraframe) compression, (2) frame-to-frame (interframe) compression, and (3) within
13 carrier compression. Specifically, in the preferred embodiment, the MPEG 2
14 compression method is used. After digital compression, the signals are combined
15 (multiplexed) and encoded. The combined signal is subsequently transmitted to various
16 uplink sites 204.

17 There may be a single uplink site 204 or multiple uplink sites (represented by
18 204', shown in phantom in Figure 1) for each operation center 202. The uplink sites 204
19 may either be located in the same geographical place or may be located remotely from the
20 operations center 202. Once the composite signal is transmitted to the uplink sites 204,
21 the signal may be multiplexed with other signals, modulated, upconverted and amplified
22 for transmission over satellite. Multiple cable headends 208 may receive such
23 transmissions.

24 In addition to multiple uplinks, the delivery system 200 may also contain multiple
25 operations centers. The preferred method for using multiple operations centers is to
26 designate one of the operations centers as a master operations center and to designate the
27 remaining operations centers as slave operations centers. In this configuration, the master
28 operations center coordinates various functions among the slave operations centers such

1 as synchronization of simultaneous transmissions and distributes the operations workload
2 efficiently.

3 4. Cable Headend

4 After the operations center 202 has compressed and encoded the program signals
5 and transmitted the signals to the satellite, the cable headend 208 receives and further
6 processes the signals before they are relayed to each set top terminal 220. Each cable
7 headend site is generally equipped with multiple satellite receiver dishes. Each dish is
8 capable of handling multiple transponder signals from a single satellite and sometimes
9 from multiple satellites.

10 As an intermediary between the set top terminals 220 and the operations center
11 202 (or other remote site), the cable headend 208 performs two primary functions. First,
12 the cable headend 208 acts as a distribution center, or signal processor, by relaying the
13 program signal to the set top terminal 220 in each subscriber's home. In addition, the
14 cable headend 208 acts as a network controller 214 by receiving information from each
15 set top terminal 220 and passing such information on to an information gathering site
16 such as the operations center 202.

17 Figure 3 shows an embodiment where the cable headend 208 and the subscriber's
18 home are linked by certain communications media 216. In this particular embodiment,
19 analog signals, digitally compressed signals, other digital signals and up-
20 stream/interactivity signals are sent and received over the media 216. The cable headend
21 208 provides such signaling capabilities in its dual roles as a signal processor 209 and
22 network controller 214.

23 As a signal processor 209, the cable headend 208 prepares the program signals
24 that are received by the cable headend 208 for transmission to each set top terminal 220.
25 In the preferred system, the signal processor 209 re-routes or demultiplexes and
26 recombines the signals and digital information received from the operations center 202
27 and allocates different portions of the signal to different frequency ranges. Cable
28 headends 208 which offer different subscribers different program offerings may allocate
29 the program signals from the operations center 202 in various manners to accommodate

1 different viewers. The signal processor 209 may also incorporate local programming
2 and/or local advertisements into the program signal and forward the revised signal to the
3 set top terminals 220. To accommodate this local programming availability, the signal
4 processor 209 must combine the local signal in digital or analog form with the operations
5 center program signals. If the local cable system uses a compression standard that is
6 different than the one used by the operations center 202, the signal processor 209 must
7 also decompress and recompress incoming signals so they may be properly formatted for
8 transmission to the set top terminals 220. This process becomes less important as
9 standards develop (i.e., MPEG 2). In addition, the signal processor 209 performs any
10 necessary signal decryption and/or encryption.

11 As a network controller 214, the cable headend 208 performs the system control
12 functions for the system. The primary function of the network controller 214 is to
13 manage the configuration of the set top terminals 220 and process signals received from
14 the set top terminals 220. In the preferred embodiment, the network controller 214
15 monitors, among other things, automatic poll-back responses from the set top terminals
16 220 remotely located at each subscribers' home. The polling and automatic report-back
17 cycle occurs frequently enough to allow the network controller 214 to maintain accurate
18 account and billing information as well as monitor authorized channel access. In the
19 simplest embodiment, information to be sent to the network controller 214 will be stored
20 in RAM within each subscriber's set top terminal 220 and will be retrieved only upon
21 polling by the network controller 214. Retrieval may, for example, occur on a daily,
22 weekly or monthly basis. The network controller 214 allows the system to maintain
23 complete information on all programs watched using a particular set top terminal 220.

24 The network controller 214 is also able to respond to the immediate needs of a set
25 top terminal 220 by modifying a program control information signal received from the
26 operations center 202. Therefore, the network controller 214 enables the delivery system
27 to adapt to the specific requirements of individual set top terminals 220 when the
28 requirements cannot be provided to the operations center 202 in advance. In other words,
29 the network controller 214 is able to perform "on the fly programming" changes. With

1 this capability, the network controller 214 can handle sophisticated local programming
2 needs such as, for example, interactive television services, split screen video, and
3 selection of different foreign languages for the same video. In addition, the network
4 controller 214 controls and monitors all compressors and decompressors in the system.

5 The delivery system 200 and digital compression of the preferred embodiment
6 provides a one-way path from the operations center 202 to the cable headend 208. Status
7 and billing information is sent from the set top terminal 220 to the network controller 214
8 at the cable headend 208 and not directly to the operations center 202. Thus, program
9 monitoring and selection control will take place only at the cable headend 208 by the
10 local cable company and its decentralized network controllers 214 (i.e., decentralized
11 relative to the operations center 202, which is central to the program delivery system
12 200). The local cable company will in turn be in communication with the operations
13 center 202 or a regional control center (not shown) which accumulates return data from
14 the set top terminal 220 for statistical or billing purposes. In alternative system
15 embodiments, the operations center 202 and the statistical and billing sites are collocated.
16 Further, telephone lines with modems are used to transfer information from the set top
17 terminal 220 to the statistical and billing sites.

18 5. Set Top Terminal

19 The set top terminal 220 is the portion of the delivery system 200 that resides in
20 the home of a subscriber. The set top terminal 220 is usually located above or below the
21 subscriber's television, but it may be placed anywhere in or near the subscriber's home
22 as long as it is within the range of the subscriber's remote control device 900. In some
23 aspects, the set top terminal 220 may resemble converter boxes already used by many
24 cable systems. For instance, each set top terminal 220 may include a variety of error
25 detection, decryption, and coding techniques such as anti-taping encoding. However, it
26 will become apparent from the discussion below that the set top terminal 220 is able to
27 perform many functions that an ordinary converter box cannot perform.

28 The set top terminal 220 has a plurality of input and output ports to enable it to
29 communicate with other local and remote devices. The set top terminal 220 has an input

1 port that receives information from the cable headend 208. In addition, the unit has at
2 least two output ports which provide communications from the set top terminal 220 to
3 a television and a VCR. Certain menu selections may cause the set top terminal 220 to
4 send control signals directly to the VCR to automatically program or operate the VCR.
5 Also, the set top terminal 220 contains a phone jack which can be used for maintenance,
6 trouble shooting, reprogramming and additional customer features. The set top terminal
7 220 may also contain stereo/audio output terminals and a satellite dish input port.

8 Functionally, the set top terminal 220 is the last component in the delivery system
9 chain. The set top terminal 220 receives compressed program and control signals from
10 the cable headend 208 (or, in some cases, directly from the operations center 202). After
11 the set top terminal 220 receives the individually compressed program and control
12 signals, the signals are demultiplexed, decompressed, converted to analog signals (if
13 necessary) and either placed in local storage (from which the menu template may be
14 created), executed immediately, or sent directly to the television screen.

15 After processing certain signals received from the cable headend 208, the set top
16 terminal 220 is able to store menu templates for creating menus that are displayed on a
17 subscriber's television by using an array of menu templates. Before a menu can be
18 constructed, menu templates must be created and sent to the set top terminal 220 for
19 storage. A microprocessor uses the control signals received from the operations center
20 202 or cable headend 208 to generate the menu templates for storage. Each menu
21 template may be stored in volatile memory in the set top terminal 220. When the set top
22 terminal receives template information it demultiplexes the program control signals
23 received from the cable headend 208 into four primary parts: video, graphics, program
24 logic and text. Each menu template represents a different portion of a whole menu, such
25 as a menu background, television logo, cursor highlight overlay, or other miscellaneous
26 components needed to build a menu. The menu templates may be deleted or altered using
27 control signals received from the operations center 202 or cable headend 208.

28 Once the menu templates have been stored in memory, the set top terminal 220
29 can generate the appropriate menus. In the preferred embodiment, the basic menu format

1 information is stored in memory located within the set top terminal 220 so that the
2 microprocessor may locally access the information from the set top terminal instead of
3 from an incoming signal. The microprocessor next generates the appropriate menus from
4 the menu templates and the other menu information stored in memory. The set top
5 terminal 220 then displays specific menus on the subscriber's television screen that
6 correspond to the inputs the subscriber selects.

7 If the subscriber selects a specific program from a menu, the set top terminal 220
8 determines on which channel the program is being shown, demultiplexes and extracts the
9 single channel transmitted from the cable headend 208. The set top terminal 220 then
10 decompresses the channel and, if necessary, converts the program signal to an analog
11 NTSC signal to enable the subscriber to view the selected program. The set top terminal
12 220 can be equipped to decompress more than one program signal, but this would
13 unnecessarily add to the cost of the unit since a subscriber will generally only view one
14 program at a time. However, two or three decompressors may be desirable to provide
15 picture-on-picture capability, control signal decompression, enhanced channel switching
16 or like features.

17 In addition to menu information, the set top terminal 220 may also store text
18 transmitted from the cable headend 208 or the operations center 202. The text may
19 inform the subscriber about upcoming events, billing and account status, new
20 subscriptions, or other relevant information. The text will be stored in an appropriate
21 memory location depending on the frequency and the duration of the use of the textual
22 message.

23 Also, optional upgrades are available to enhance the performance of a subscriber's
24 set top terminal 220. These upgrades may consist of a cartridge or computer card (not
25 shown) that is inserted into an expansion slot in the set top terminal 220 or may consist
26 of a feature offered by the cable headend 208 or operations center 202 to which the user
27 may subscribe. Available upgrades may include on line data base services, interactive
28 multi-media services, access to digital radio channels, and other services.

1 In the simplest embodiment, available converter boxes such as those
2 manufactured by General Instruments or Scientific Atlanta, may be modified and
3 upgraded to perform the functions of a set top terminal 220. The preferred upgrade is a
4 circuit card with a microprocessor which is electronically connected to or inserted into
5 the converter box.

6 6. Remote Control Device

7 The primary conduit for communication between the subscriber and the set top
8 terminal 220 is through the subscriber interface, preferably a remote control device 900.
9 Through this interface, the subscriber may select desired programming through the
10 system's menu-driven scheme or by directly accessing a specific channel by entering the
11 actual channel number. Using the interface, the subscriber can navigate through a series
12 of informative program selection menus. By using menu-driven, iconic or alpha-
13 character access, the subscriber can access desired programs by simply pressing a single
14 button rather than recalling from memory and pressing the actual channel number to
15 make a selection. The subscriber can access regular broadcast and basic cable television
16 stations by using either the numeric keys on the remote control 900 (pressing the
17 corresponding channel number), or one of the menu icon selection options.

18 In addition to enabling the subscriber to easily interact with the cable system 200,
19 the physical characteristics of the subscriber interface 900 should also add to the user
20 friendliness of the system. The remote control 900 should easily fit in the palm of the
21 user's hand. The buttons of the preferred remote control 900 contain pictorial symbols
22 that are easily identifiable by the subscriber. Also, buttons that perform similar functions
23 may be color coordinated and consist of distinguishing textures to increase the user
24 friendliness of the system.

25 7. Menu-Driven Program Selection

26 The menu-driven scheme provides the subscriber with one-step access to all major
27 menus, ranging from hit movies to sport specials to specialty programs. From any of the
28 major menus, the subscriber can in turn access submenus and minor menus by cursor or
29 alpha-character access.

1 There are two different types of menus utilized by the preferred embodiment, the
2 Program Selection menus and the During Program menus. The first series of menus,
3 Program Selection menus, consists of an Introductory, a Home, Major menus, and
4 Submenus. The second series of menus, During Program menus, consists of two primary
5 types, Hidden menus and the Program Overlay menus.

6 Immediately after the subscriber turns on the set top terminal 220, the
7 Introductory menu welcomes the subscriber to the system. The Introductory menu may
8 display important announcements from the local cable franchise, advertisements from the
9 cable provider, or other types of messages. In addition, the Introductory menu can inform
10 the subscriber if the cable headend 208 has sent a personal message to the subscriber's
11 particular set top terminal 220.

12 After the Introductory menu has been displayed the subscriber may advance to the
13 next level of menus, namely the Home menu. In the preferred embodiment, after a
14 certain period of time, the cable system will advance the subscriber by default to the
15 Home menu. From the Home menu, the subscriber is able to access all of the
16 programming options. The subscriber may either select a program directly by entering
17 the appropriate channel number from the remote control 900, or the subscriber may
18 sequence through incremental levels of menu options starting from the Home menu. The
19 Home menu lists categories that correspond to the first level of menus called Major
20 menus.

21 If the subscriber chooses to sequence through subsequent menus, the subscriber
22 will be forwarded to the Major menu that corresponds to the chosen category from the
23 Home menu. The Major menus further refine a subscriber's search and help guide the
24 subscriber to the selection of his choice.

25 From the Major menus, the subscriber may access several submenus. From each
26 submenu, the subscriber may access other submenus until the subscriber finds a desired
27 television program. Similar to the Major menu, each successive level of Submenus
28 further refines the subscriber's search. The system also enables the subscriber to skip

1 certain menus or submenus and directly access a specific menu or television program by
2 entering the appropriate commands on the remote control 900.

3 The During program menus (including Hidden Menus and Program Overlay
4 Menus) are displayed by the set top terminal 220 only after the subscriber has selected
5 a television program. In order to avoid disturbing the subscriber, the set top terminal 220
6 does not display the Hidden Menus until the subscriber selects the appropriate option to
7 display a Hidden Menu. The Hidden Menus contain options that are relevant to the
8 program selected by the viewer. For example, a Hidden Menu may contain options that
9 enable a subscriber to enter an interactive mode or escape from the selected program.

10 Program Overlay Menus are similar to Hidden Menus because they occur during
11 a program and are related to the program being viewed. However, the Program Overlay
12 Menus are displayed concurrently with the program selected by the subscriber. Most
13 Program Overlay Menus are small enough on the screen to allow the subscriber to
14 continue viewing the selected program comfortably.

15 B. Detailed Set Top Terminal Description

16 The set top terminal 220 receives and manipulates signals from the cable headend
17 208. The set top terminal 220 is equipped with local computer memory and the capability
18 of interpreting the digitally compressed signal to produce menus for the subscriber. The
19 remote control 900 communicates the subscriber's selections to the set top terminal 220.
20 The subscriber's selections are generally based upon menus or other prompts displayed
21 on the television screen.

22 It is preferred that the signal reaches the subscriber's home in a compressed
23 format and is decompressed prior to viewing. Included in the delivered program signal
24 is information that enables equipment at the subscriber's home to display menus for
25 choosing particular programs. Depending on the particular embodiment, the television
26 program signal may arrive at the subscriber's home through one or more connections
27 such as coaxial cables, fiber cables, twisted pairs, cellular telephone connections, or
28 personal communications network (PCN) hookups.

1 The program control information signal is generated by the operations center 202
2 and provides the network controller 214 with data on the scheduling and description of
3 programs. In an alternate configuration, this data is sent directly to the set top terminal
4 220 for display to the subscriber. In the preferred embodiment, the program control
5 information signal is stored and modified by the network controller 214 and sent to the
6 set top terminal 220 in the form of a set top terminal control information stream
7 (STTCIS). The set top terminal 220 integrates either the program control information
8 signal or the STTCIS with data stored in the memory of the set top terminal 220 to
9 generate on-screen menus that assist the subscriber in choosing programs for display.

10 The types of information that can be sent using the program control signal
11 include: number of program categories, names of program categories, what channels are
12 assigned to a specific category (such as specialty channels), names of channels, names
13 of programs on each channel, program start times, length of programs, description of
14 programs, menu assignment for each program, pricing, whether there is a sample video
15 clip for advertisement for the program, and any other program, menu or product
16 information.

17 With a minimal amount of information being communicated to the set top
18 terminal 220 on a regular basis, the set top terminal 220 is able to determine the proper
19 menu location for each program and the proper time and channel to activate for the
20 subscriber after a menu selection. The program control information signal and STTCIS
21 can be formatted in a variety of ways and the on-screen menus can be produced using
22 many different methods. For instance, if the program control information signal carries
23 no menu format information, the menu format for creating the menus can be fixed in
24 ROM at the set top terminal 220. In the preferred embodiment, the menu format
25 information is stored at the set top terminal 220 in a temporary memory device such as
26 a RAM or EPROM. New menu format information is sent via the program control
27 information signal or the STTCIS to the set top terminals 200 whenever a change to a
28 menu format is desired.

1 In the simplest embodiment, the menu formats remain fixed and only the text
2 changes. In this way the program control information signal can be limited to primarily
3 text and a text generator can be employed in the set top terminal 220. Another simple
4 embodiment uses a separate channel full-time (large bandwidth) just for the menu
5 information.

6 Live video signals may be used in windows of certain menus. These video signals
7 can be transmitted using the program control information signal or STTCIS, or can be
8 taken off channels being transmitted simultaneously with the menu display. Video for
9 menus, promos or demos may be sent to the set top terminal 220 in several formats,
10 including (1) on a dedicated channel, (2) on a regular program channel and scaled to size,
11 or (3) along with the program control information signal. However, in the preferred
12 embodiment, a large number of short promos or demo video is sent using a split screen
13 technique on a dedicated channel. A multiple window technique may be used with the
14 menus to display a description of a program and one or more video frames that assist the
15 subscriber in selecting the program.

16 Figure 4 shows the basic hardware components of the set top terminal 220. The
17 set top terminal 220 has a tuner 603, digital demodulator 606, decryptor 600, and
18 demultiplexers 609, 616 as well as audio equipment 612 and a remote control interface
19 626 for receiving and processing signals from the remote control unit 900. An optional
20 modem 627 allows communication between a microprocessor 602 and the cable headend
21 208. An NTSC encoder 625 provides a standard NTSC video output.

22 The microprocessor 602 is capable of executing program instructions stored in
23 memory. These instructions allow a user to access various menus by making selections
24 on the remote control 900.

25 The manner in which the video is decompressed and the menus are generated
26 from the program control information signal or STTCIS varies depending on the specific
27 embodiment of the invention. Video decompressors 618 and 622 may be used if the
28 video is compressed. The program control information signal may be demultiplexed into

1 its component parts, and a video decompressor 618, graphic decompressor, text generator
2 and video combiner 624 may be used to assist in creating the menus.

3 In addition to the menu format information that is stored in graphics memory, the
4 set top terminal 220 also stores data, tracking those programs that have been selected for
5 viewing. By gathering this data, the set top terminal 220 can maintain an accurate record
6 of all programs accessed/watched by storing the data in EEPROM or RAM.
7 Subsequently, this data can be transmitted to the cable headend 208, where it can be used
8 in carrying out network control and monitoring functions. Such data transmissions
9 between the set top terminal 220 and cable headend 208 can be accomplished, for
10 example, through upstream transmission over the cable network or over telephone lines
11 through the use of telephone modems. Where upstream transmission over the cable
12 network is used, the set top terminals 220 can complete data transmissions on a scheduled
13 (e.g., using a polling response or status report to respond to polling requests sent from the
14 cable headend 208) or as-needed (e.g., using a random access technique) basis.

15 Figure 5a shows the front panel of the set top terminal 220, which includes an
16 infrared sensor 630 and a series of LED displays 640. The LED displays 640 may
17 indicate with an icon or a letter (e.g. A-K) the major menu currently selected by the set
18 top terminal 220 or the channels selected directly by a user, or menu channel selections
19 (e.g., from 1 to 50). Further displays may include current channel, time, volume level,
20 sleep time, parental lock (security), account balance, use of a hardware upgrade, second
21 channel being recorded by VCR, use of the Level D music hardware upgrade in a separate
22 room, and any other displays useful to a subscriber to indicate the current status of the set
23 top terminal 220. The LEDs 640 may also provide an indication of the digital audio
24 channel currently tuned.

25 The set top terminal 220 includes a flapped opening 635 on its front that allows
26 the insertion of a magnetic cartridge (or similar portable storage device, including optical
27 disk, ROM, EPROM, etc. not shown). This cartridge opening 635 allows the set top
28 terminal 220 to be upgraded or reprogrammed locally with the use of a magnetic tape
29 cartridge.

1 On the top or cover of the set top terminal 220 are located pushbutton controls
2 645. Any function that can be performed on the remote 900 may also be performed at the
3 set top terminal 220 using the duplicative pushbutton controls 645.

4 Figure 5b shows the back of the set top terminal 220, which includes a pair of
5 output terminals 650, pair of input terminals 652, pair of stereo/audio output terminals
6 654, satellite dish input port 656, telephone jack 658 and an RS-422 port 660. In
7 addition, an upgrade port 662 and a cover plate 664 are held in place by a series of sheet
8 metal screws. One of the output terminals 650 is for a television and the other is for a
9 VCR. The set top terminal 220 is equipped to handle incoming signals on one or two
10 cables using the input terminals 652. The phone jack 658 and an RS-232 or RS-422 port
11 660 are provided for maintenance, trouble shooting, reprogramming and additional
12 customer features. In alternate embodiments, the telephone jack 658 may be used as the
13 primary mode of communication between the cable headend 208 and the set top terminal
14 220. This connection is possible through the local telephone, cellular telephone or a
15 personal communications network (PCN).

16 The basic programming of each set top terminal 220 is located on ROM within
17 the set top terminal 220. Random access memory, the magnetic cartridge capability, and
18 the expansion card slot 635 each allow upgrades and changes to be easily made to the set
19 top terminal 220.

20 In the preferred embodiment, the set top terminal 220 includes a hardware
21 upgrade port 662, in addition to expansion card slots. The hardware upgrade port 662
22 accommodates a four-wire (or more) connection for: (1) error corrected, decrypted data
23 output of the set top terminal 220, (2) a control interface, (3) decompressed video output,
24 and (4) a video input port. In the preferred embodiment, multiple wires are used to
25 perform each of the four functions. The four sets of wires are combined in a single cable
26 with a single multipin connector.

27 In the preferred embodiment, multipin connections may be used for the multiwire
28 cable. The multipin connection 662 may range from DB9 to DB25. A variety of small

1 computer systems interface (SCSI) ports may also be provided. Alternatively, four or
2 more ports may be provided instead of the single port depicted.

3 Another port 662 is used to attach the various hardware upgrades described below
4 to a set top terminal 220. The preferred embodiment has a number of hardware upgrades
5 available for use with a set top terminal 220, including: (1) a Level A interactive unit,
6 (2) a Level B interactive unit, (3) a Level C interactive unit with compact disc capability,
7 (4) a Level D digital radio tuner for separate room use, and (5) a Level E information
8 download unit. Each of these upgrades may be connected to the set top terminal 220 unit
9 through the upgrade port 662 described earlier. The same four wires in a single cable
10 described earlier may be used.

11 Existing set top converter boxes such as those made by Scientific Atlanta or
12 General Instruments are presently unequipped to handle the menu selection system of the
13 present invention. Thus, hardware modifications are necessary in order to use the menu
14 selection system with existing set top converter technology.

15 A Turbo Card addition to a set top converter is depicted in Figure 6. The Turbo
16 Card 700 shown provides the additional functionality needed to utilize the menu system
17 with existing set top converter technology. The primary functions the Turbo Card 700
18 adds to the set top converter are the interpreting of program control information signals,
19 generating of menus, sequencing of menus, and, ultimately, the ability of the viewer to
20 select a channel through the menu system without entering any channel identifying
21 information. The turbo card also provides a method for a remote location, such as the
22 cable headend 208, to receive information on programs watched and control the operation
23 of the set top converter and Turbo Card 700. The programs watched information and
24 control commands may be passed from the cable headend 208 to the Turbo Card 700
25 using telephone lines.

26 The primary components of the Turbo Card 700 are a PC chip CPU 702, a VGA
27 graphic controller 704, a video combiner 706, logic circuitry 708, NTSC encoder 710, a
28 receiver 712, demodulator 714, and a dialer 716. The Turbo Card 700 operates by
29 receiving the program control information signal from the cable headend 208 through the

1 coaxial cable. The logic circuitry 708 of the Turbo Card 700 receives data, infrared
2 commands, and synchronization signals from the set top converter. Menu selections
3 made by the viewer on the remote control 900 are received by the set top converter's IR
4 equipment and passed through to the Turbo Card 700. The Turbo Card 700 interprets the
5 IR signal and determines the program (or menu) the viewer has selected. The Turbo Card
6 700 modifies the IR command to send the program selection information to the set top
7 converter 221. The modified IR command contains the channel information needed by
8 the set top converter. Using the phone line and dialer 716, the Turbo Card 700 is able to
9 transmit program access information to the cable headend 208.

10 In the preferred embodiment, program access information, that is what programs
11 the viewer watched, is stored at each set top terminal 220 until it is polled by the network
12 controller 214 using a polling request message format as shown in Figure 7a. This frame
13 format 920 consists of six fields, namely: (1) a leading flag 922 at the beginning of the
14 message, (2) an address field 924, (3) a subscriber region designation 926, (4) a set top
15 terminal identifier 928 that includes a polling command/response (or P/F) bit 930, (5) an
16 information field 932, and (6) a trailing flag 934 at the end of the message. Figure 7b
17 shows a response frame format 920' (similar to the frame format 920 end, therefore,
18 commonly numbered with the frame depicted in Figure 7a, but with the prime indicator
19 added for clarity) for information communicated by the set top terminal 220 to the
20 network controller 214 in response to the polling request of Figure 7a.

21 The eight-bit flag sequence 922 that appears at the beginning and end of a frame
22 is used to establish and maintain synchronization. Such a sequence typically consists of
23 a "01111110" bit-stream. The address field 924 designates a 4-bit address for a given set
24 top terminal 220. The subscriber region designation 926 is a 4-bit field that indicates the
25 geographical region in which the subscriber's set top terminal 220 is housed. The set top
26 terminal identifier 928 is a 16-bit field that uniquely identifies each set top terminal 220
27 with a 15-bit designation followed by an appended P/F bit 930. Although field size is
28 provided by this example, a variety of sizes can be used with the present invention.

1 The P/F bit 930 is used to command a polling response from the set top terminal
2 220 addressed, as described below. The response frame format 920' also provides a
3 variable-length information field 932' for other data transmissions, such as information
4 on system updates. The frame format 920' ends with an 8-bit flag (or trailing flag) 934'
5 that is identical in format to the leading flag 922', as set forth above. Other frame
6 formats (e.g., MPEG) will be apparent to one skilled in the art and can be easily adapted
7 for use with the system.

8 As summarized above, images or programs may be selected for display by
9 sequencing through a series of menus. Figure 8 is an example of one possible structure
10 for a series of menus. Generally, the sequence of menus is structured with an
11 introductory menu, a home menu, various major menus and a multitude of submenus.
12 The submenus can include promo menus and during program menus. For example, at the
13 home menu portion of the sequence of menus and corresponding software routines, a
14 subscriber may select one of the major menus and start a sequence of menu displays.
15 Alternatively, a subscriber may go directly to a major menu by depressing a menu select
16 button on remote control 900.

17 At any time during the menu sequence, the subscriber may depress a major menu
18 button to move into another series of menus. In this way, a subscriber may move from
19 major menu to major menu.

20 The various software subroutines executed by the microprocessor 602 allow a
21 subscriber to sequence the menus, navigating through the various menus of the present
22 invention. A subscriber may sequence back through menus or return to the home menu
23 with a single touch of the home menu button on remote 900.

24 An introductory menu screen 1000 automatically appears upon power-up and
25 initialization of the set top terminal 220. From this introductory menu screen 1000, the
26 set top terminal software will normally advance the subscriber to the home menu screen
27 1010. The home menu 1010 is the basic menu that the subscriber will return to in order
28 to make the first level of viewing decisions. When the set top terminal software is
29 displaying the home menu 1010, the subscriber is able to access any television

1 programming option. The software allows programming options to be entered through
2 cursor movement on the screen and directly by button selection on the remote control
3 900.

4 In the normal progression through the menu screens, the software will forward the
5 subscriber to a major menu screen 1020 in response to the subscriber's remote control
6 900 selection or highlighted cursor selection from the home menu screen 1010. The
7 selections displayed on the home menu 1010 are for large categories of programming
8 options.

9 Following the major menu 1020, the subscriber may navigate through one or more
10 submenu screens 1050 from which the subscriber may choose one particular program for
11 viewing. For most programming selections, the user will proceed from the home menu
12 1010 to a major menu 1020 and then to one or more submenus 1050. However, for
13 certain programming options or functions of the set top terminal 220, the user may skip
14 one or more menus in the sequence.

15 The During Program Menus 1200 are submenus enabled by the set top terminal
16 software only after the subscriber has selected a television program. These menus
17 provide the subscriber with additional functionality and/or additional information while
18 viewing a selected program. The During Program Menus 1200 sequence can be further
19 subdivided into at least two types of menus, Hidden Menus 1380 and Program Overlay
20 Menus 1390.

21 To avoid disturbing a subscriber during viewing of a program, the Hidden Menus
22 1380 are not shown to the subscriber but instead "reside" at the set top terminal 220
23 microprocessor 602. The microprocessor 602 awaits a button entry either from the
24 remote control 900 or set top terminal 220 buttons before executing or displaying any
25 Hidden Menu 1380 options. The set top terminal software provides the subscriber with
26 additional functions such as entering an interactive mode or escaping from a selected
27 program through use of Hidden Menus 1380.

28 Program Overlay Menus 1390 are similar to Hidden Menus 1380. However, the
29 Program Overlay Menus 1390 are overlaid onto portions of the displayed video and not

1 hidden. The software for the Program Overlay Menus 1390 allows the subscriber to
2 continue to watch the selected television program with audio but places graphical
3 information on a portion of the television screen. Most Program Overlay Menus 1390
4 are graphically generated to cover small portions of video. Some Overlays 1390 which
5 are by their nature more important than the program being viewed will overlay onto
6 greater portions of the video. Examples of types of overlay menus 1390 include
7 Notification Menus 1392 and Confirmation Menus 1394. In the preferred embodiment,
8 the software for the Program Overlay Menus 1390 controls the reduction or scales down
9 the (entire) programs video and redirects the video to a portion of the screen.

10 Submenus provide the cost of viewing the program and the program's length in
11 hours and minutes. From the submenus, the subscriber is given at least three options: (1)
12 to purchase a program, (2) to return to the previous menu, and (3) to press "go" and return
13 to regular TV. The subscriber may also be given other options such as previewing the
14 program.

15 Using an on-screen menu approach to program selection, there is nearly an
16 unlimited number of menus that can be shown to the subscriber. The memory capability
17 of the set top terminal 220 and the quantity of information that is sent using the program
18 control information signal are the only limits on the number of menus and amount of
19 information that can be displayed to the subscriber. The approach of using a series of
20 menus in a simple tree sequence is both easy for the subscriber to use and simply
21 implemented by the set top terminal 220 and remote control device 900 with cursor
22 movement. A user interface software programmer will find many obvious variations
23 from the preferred embodiment described.

24 The set top terminal 220 generates and creates menus using, in part, information
25 stored in its graphics memory. A background graphics file 800 will store menu
26 backgrounds and a logo graphics file will store any necessary logos. A menu display and
27 cursor graphics file will store menu display blocks and cursor highlight overlays as well
28 as any other miscellaneous files needed to build the menus. Using this method of storing
29 menus, the menus can be changed by reprogramming the graphics memory of the set top

1 terminal 220 through instructions from either the network controller 214 or operations
2 center 202.

3 The microprocessor 602 performs the steps required to create a menu using stored
4 information. The microprocessor 602 fetches a background file, logo file, menu display
5 and cursor file in most instances. The microprocessor 602 fetches text from long-term,
6 intermediate-term, or short-term storage depending on where the text is stored. Using a
7 video combiner (or like device), the stored information is combined with video and the
8 entire image is sent to the television screen for display.

9 In the preferred embodiment, a graphics controller is used to assist the set top
10 terminal 220 in generating menus. Menu generation by the set top terminal 220 begins
11 with the building of a major menu screen, which includes background graphics for that
12 major menu. The background graphics may include an upper sash across the top of the
13 screen and a lower sash across the bottom of the screen. The background graphics may
14 be generated from the background graphics file 800 in the memory files of the graphics
15 memory (preferably EEPROM). In addition, logo graphics may be generated. Such
16 graphics typically include an icon window, a cable company logo, a channel company
17 logo, and two "go" buttons.

18 Preferably, the text for each major menu is generated separately by a text
19 generator in the set top terminal 220. Those portions of the text that generally remain the
20 same for a period of weeks or months may be stored in EEPROM or other local storage.
21 Text which changes on a regular basis, such as the movie titles (or other program
22 selections), is transmitted to the set top terminal 220 by either the operations center 202
23 or the network controller 214 of the cable headend 208. In this manner, the cable
24 headend 208 may change the program selections available on any major menu 1020 by
25 modifying the program control information signal sent by the operations center 202 and
26 transmitting any changes using the STTCIS.

27 Day, date and time information are added to each major menu. This information
28 is sent from the operations center 202, the cable headend 208 (signal processor 209 or

1 network controller 214), the uplink site, or generated by the set top terminal 220
2 internally.

3 The creation and display of program description submenus is performed by the
4 set top terminal 220 in a manner similar to that described above. Each submenu may be
5 created in parts and combined before being sent to the television screen. Preferably,
6 background graphics and upper and lower sashes are used. Likewise, a video window
7 and half-strip window can be generated from information in storage on the EEPROM.

8 In addition to graphics and text, some submenus include windows that show
9 video. Such video may be still or moving pictures. Still pictures may be stored in a
10 compressed format (such as JPEG) at the set top terminal 220. Video stills may be
11 transmitted by the operations center 202 through the program control information signal
12 from time to time.

13 Moving video picture is obtained directly from a current video feed as described
14 above. Depending on video window size, this may require manipulation of the video
15 signal, including scaling down the size of the video and redirecting the video to the
16 portion of the menu screen which is within the video window of the menu.
17 Alternatively, the video may be obtained from a split screen channel. Such a method
18 involves the use of split screen video techniques to send multiple video clips on a single
19 channel at a given time. The set top terminal 220 would scale the picture, if necessary,
20 and redirect it to the correct position on the screen using known scaling and positioning
21 techniques. Additional circuitry may be required in the set top terminal 220 to perform
22 adequate scaling and repositioning.

23 To avoid the need for redirecting video into the portion of the screen which
24 houses the video window, masking and menu graphics may be used to cover the portions
25 of the channel video that are not needed. This masking technique allows the split screen
26 video to remain in the same portion of the screen that it is transmitted by the operations
27 center 202. The masking is then adjusted to cover the undesired portions of the screen.
28 These masks are stored in the background graphics file similarly to other background files
29 for menus.

1 The split screen video technique may also be used for promoting television
2 programming. Since a great number of short video clips may be sent continuously, full
3 or partial screen promotionals (or informationals) may be provided to the subscriber.
4 With this large quantity of promotional video, the subscriber is given the opportunity to
5 "graze" through new movie or television programming selections. The subscriber simply
6 grazes from promotional video to promotional video until the desired television program
7 is discovered.

8 C. Detailed Description of Advanced Set Top Terminal

9 1. Overview

10 The present invention relates to advances in the set top terminal 220 described
11 above. In particular, the present invention may be achieved through a set of hardware
12 upgrades or additions to the following embodiments: (1) an existing set top converter (not
13 shown) upgraded with a Turbo Card 700 or the like; (2) an industry standard digital
14 decompression converter box (as shown in Figures 9a and 9b below) ungradable by either
15 an upgrade module or a menu generation card; (3) a set top terminal 200 capable of both
16 decompression and menu generation; or (4) a digital television. The set of hardware
17 upgrades described below can be used to provide additional advanced features and
18 functional capabilities to any of these embodiments.

19 Table A shows several exemplary hardware configurations that may be used to
20 achieve the goals of the present invention. In particular, Table A shows four columns of
21 set top converter technology, which may be modified to produce the various set top
22 capabilities shown in the three rows of the table.

TABLE A

/	Existing Analog Set Top Converter	Set Top Converter With Digital Decompression	Set Top Converter With Digital Decompression & Menu Generation Capabilities	Advanced Set Top Terminal
/				
/				
/				
Decompression Capability	N/A	Built-In	Built-In	Built-In
Menu Generation Capability	Turbo Card	Upgrade Module or Menu Generation Card	Built-In	Built-In
Advanced Features	Level A-C Hardware Upgrades or Expansion Card	Level A-E Hardware Upgrades or Expansion Card	Level A-E Hardware Upgrades or Expansion Card	Built-In
/				
/				
/				

The table shows the various inherent functional capabilities of each set top converter, and how each may be modified or upgraded, if necessary, to achieve the objectives of the present invention. From left to right, the columns of the table span the various alternatives for balancing those capabilities that may be built into set top converters or terminals, on the one hand, and those capabilities that can be provided through, for example, an upgrade module, expansion card or hardware upgrade of the present invention, on the other. This balance allows a designer or manufacturer of set top converters to choose between adding advanced functionality to an existing converter box or, instead, producing a converter with additional built-in features that increase cost and complexity of the converter or terminal.

The first column of Table A shows how an existing analog set top converter can be modified to provide menu generation capability through the use of the Turbo Card. In addition to the Turbo Card, such an existing analog set top converter may be further modified to provide any of the advanced features described below through the use of the Level A, Level B and Level C hardware upgrades or an expansion card. Such existing set top converter boxes are currently manufactured by Scientific Atlanta and General

1 Instruments, among others. These converter boxes have been designed for use with
2 analog waveforms and, as a result, digital decompression capabilities are not applicable.

3 The second column of Table A shows a set top converter with digital
4 decompression capability. This converter is a simple decompression box which may
5 eventually become the industry standard. The simple decompression boxes may be
6 modified to provide the enhanced functionality of the present invention. For example,
7 a simple decompression box may be modified to produce menu generation capability
8 through the use of an upgrade module or menu generation card. In addition, other
9 advanced features may be added to a simple decompression box through modifications
10 that include any of the Level A through E hardware upgrades or an expansion card. Each
11 of these modifications are described below.

12 The third column of Table A shows a set top converter that has built-in digital
13 decompression and menu generation capabilities. Thus, in order to achieve the enhanced
14 functionality of the present invention, other advanced features may be provided through
15 hardware modification. Such modification may be accomplished through the use of any
16 of the Level A through E hardware upgrades or the expansion card, as explained below.

17 The fourth column of Table A shows an advanced set top terminal having
18 decompression, menu generation, and advanced functional capabilities. Each of these
19 capabilities are built in to the terminal itself. In this way, achieving the enhanced
20 performance of the set top terminal in accordance with the present invention would
21 require no hardware modification.

22 In the preferred embodiment, the advanced set top terminal 220 of the present
23 invention has the capability, among other things, of receiving tiered programming from
24 the network controller. Tiered programming allows different users to view different
25 video even though the subscribers are "tuned" to the same channel. For example, the
26 network controller 214 may know the demographics of its subscribers through a database,
27 by "learning" from prior subscriber choices, from an interactive selection, or from other
28 means. Using the demographics information, the network controller 214 may target
29 commercials to the correct audience by showing different commercials to subscribers

1 with different demographics. Even though subscribers will believe they are "tuned" to
2 one channel, each subscriber will be switched to a different channel for the tiered video.
3 Alternatively, subscribers may be offered an option of several commercials from which
4 to choose.

5 To accommodate foreign speaking subscribers, multiple audio channels for
6 television programming may be provided. In this way, the subscriber may be shown
7 menus of programs available in the subscriber's native language. The function of
8 choosing the correct audio to correspond to the selected language may be handled by
9 either the set top terminal 220 or the network controller 214 depending upon the
10 configuration. Local programming in several languages or additional audio channels for
11 a foreign language translation of a popular television program may be provided by the
12 network controller 214. Using a picture-on-picture feature, sign language may be
13 similarly made available to certain set top terminals 220 for the deaf. Also, a text overlay
14 may easily be produced on the lower part of the screen for the deaf.

15 Typically, each video signal is received at the set top terminal 220 along with four
16 audio channels. Two of these audio channels will preferably be used for left and right
17 stereo audio reception of the video signal being displayed. The remaining two audio
18 signals may be used for alternative languages. For example, where a video signal is
19 received by the set top terminal 220, two of the audio channels will provide the stereo
20 audio signals for that video in English, with the other two audio channels providing mono
21 audio signals in French and Spanish, for example. In this way, each video signal received
22 at the set top terminal 220 can accommodate at least two foreign languages. Where
23 stereo audio channels are not desired, the audio channels in English can be set to a single
24 signal, providing mono audio reception, and increasing the multiple language audio
25 channel capability to three foreign languages.

26 In other embodiments, the network controller 214 can act as a central computer
27 and provide intra-set top terminal interactive games, inter-set top terminal interactive
28 games, computer bulletin board type services, message services (Electronic mail) etc. For
29 example, a subscriber may play war games with five (anonymous) fellow subscribers

1 each in their own home each operating a separate tank. The network controller 214
2 gathers the players via set top terminal 220 communications and acts as the referee. A
3 bulletin board or message system can be set up to discuss a particular program such as
4 "Twin Peaks Whodunit" for enthusiasts. These interactive features are further described
5 below with the interactive services level B menu and the set top terminal hardware
6 upgrade level B interactive unit.

7 In order to achieve the required throughput of video and audio information for the
8 system, digital compression techniques for video are employed. As a result, the set top
9 terminal 220 typically must decompress any digitally compressed program signals that
10 it receives. Methods of decompression are a function of the compression technique used
11 in the program delivery system.

12 There are three basic digital compression techniques: within-frame (intraframe),
13 frame-to-frame (interframe), and within-carrier compression. Various compression
14 methods may be used with these techniques. Such methods of compression, which
15 include vector quantization and discrete cosine transform methodologies, are known to
16 those skilled in the art.

17 Several standard digital formats representing both digitizing standards and
18 compression standards have also been developed. For example, JPEG (joint
19 photographic experts group) is a standard for single picture digitization. Motion picture
20 digitization may be represented by standards such as MPEG or MPEG 2 (motion picture
21 engineering group specification). In addition to these standards, other proprietary
22 standards have been developed. Although MPEG and MPEG 2 for motion pictures are
23 preferred in the present invention, any reliable digital format with compression may be
24 used.

25 Various hybrids of the above compression techniques and methods have been
26 developed by several companies including AT&T, Compression Labs, Inc., General
27 Instruments, Scientific-Atlanta, Philips, and Zenith. Any of the compression techniques
28 developed by these companies, as well as other techniques known to those skilled in the
29 art, may be used with the present invention.

1 2. Advanced Set Top Terminal Major Components and Upgrades

2 a. Decompression Box with Upgrade Module

3 The preferred program delivery system uses digitally compressed signals and, as
4 a result, the preferred subscriber equipment configuration must be capable of
5 decompressing and processing such digitally compressed signals. Figure 9a diagrams the
6 basic interplay between an upgrade module 300 and a simple decompression box 302.
7 The upgrade module 300 can be connected to the decompression box 302 through a port
8 similar to the upgrade port 662 described above (Figure 5b). The simple decompression
9 box 302 shown is preferably a future industry standard decompression box capable of
10 communicating with an upgrade module 300 to enhance functionality.

11 The upgrade module 300 provides menu generation capability to the simple
12 decompression box 302. The microprocessor of the simple decompression box 302
13 communicates with the microprocessor in the upgrade module 300 to provide the full
14 functionality of a set top terminal 220.

15 In the preferred embodiment, multipin connections may be used for a multiwire
16 cable connecting the simple decompression box 302 with the upgrade module 300. The
17 multipin connection may range from DB9 to DB25. A SCSI, or small computer systems
18 interface, port (not shown) may also be provided. Alternatively, four or more ports may
19 be provided instead of the single port depicted. If a port is not provided, the upgrade
20 module may, alternatively, be hard-wired to the simple decompression box 302.

21 As represented generally at 304, the digital data set of output wires of the simple
22 decompression box 302 will preferably output error corrected and decrypted data to the
23 upgrade module 300. The second set of wires, providing the interface connection, allows
24 the microprocessor in the upgrade module 300 to communicate with the microprocessor
25 of the simple decompression box 302. In this manner, the video circuitry of the upgrade
26 module 300 and the simple decompression box 302 may maintain synchronization. The
27 third set of wires, providing the decompressed video output, provide the upgrade module
28 300 with a decompressed video signal to manipulate. The fourth set of wires, comprising

1 the video input set, allows the simple decompression box 302 to accept a video signal that
2 is a combined text, graphics, and video signal.

3 Figure 9a further shows the CATV input 306, video input 308, and video and
4 audio outputs 310, 312, as part of the simple decompression box 302. This embodiment
5 reduces the component cost of upgrade module 300, and thus, is preferred. The upgrade
6 module 300 may simply be a cartridge (not shown) insertable into the simple
7 decompression box 302. Alternatively, as shown in commonly numbered Figure 9b, the
8 CATV input 306, video input 308 and video and audio outputs 310, 312 may be included
9 as part of the upgrade module 300. In this embodiment, the simple decompression box
10 302 is primarily used for decompressing the video.

11 Referring to Figure 10, the upgrade module 300 preferably includes the following
12 circuitry: a video graphics and text demultiplexer 314; a text and graphics video plane
13 combiner 316; a run length graphics decompressor 318; and, a run length compressed
14 graphics memory 319 (nonvolatile RAM, ROM, EPROM, or EEPROM). By means of
15 communications through the multiwire connection between the upgrade module 300 and
16 the simple decompression box 302, compressed video and control signals may be
17 demultiplexed by the demultiplexer 314 within the upgrade module 300. The run length
18 graphics decompressor 318, through communications with the run length compressed
19 graphics RAM 319, permits decompression of the input compressed video signal. The
20 text and graphics video plane combiner 316 allows demultiplexed and decompressed
21 signals to be output, through the simple decompression box 302, to a subscriber's
22 television 222 showing both video and overlay menus with text.

23 Figure 10 shows the elements of a simple decompression box 302 (numbered
24 commonly with the elements of the set top terminal 220 depicted in Figure 4) with the
25 upgrade module 300 described above. Generated menus and video are combined in the
26 combiner 316 and output to an antitaping encoder 619. Any method of antitaping
27 encoding known by those skilled in the art may be used with the present invention.

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1 Data targeted to individual set top terminals 220 is received by the data receiver
2 332 according to each set top terminal's specific address or ID (e.g. set top ID 928, 928').
3 In this way, each addressable set top terminal 220 only receives its own data. The data
4 receiver 332 may receive set top terminal specific data in the information field of the
5 program control information signal frame described with reference to Figure 7a or on a
6 separate data carrier located at a convenient frequency in the incoming spectrum.

7 Any received data includes information regarding channels and programs
8 available for selection. The subscriber may enter a series of commands using the keypad
9 645 or remote control 900 in order to choose a channel or program. Upon receipt of such
10 commands, the set top terminal's microprocessor 602 instructs the tuner 603 to tune to
11 the proper frequency of the channel or program desired and subsequently instructs the
12 processing circuitry 340 to begin descrambling of this channel or program.

13 Upon selection of a channel or program, the microprocessor 602 stores any
14 selection information in local memory for later data transmission back to the cable
15 headend 208. Typically, the data transmitter 344 operates in the return frequency band
16 between 5 and 30 MHZ. In an alternative embodiment, the frequency band of 10 to 15
17 MHZ may be used. Regardless, however, of the frequency band used, the data transmitter
18 344 sends information to the cable headend 208 or network controller 214 in the
19 information field of the frame described with reference to figure 7b. Those skilled in the
20 art will recognize that a number of variations and combinations of the above-described
21 set top terminal 220 hardware components may be used to accomplish upstream data
22 transmissions.

23 c. Hardware Upgrades

24 In order to enhance a set top terminal's 220 functionality, the following hardware
25 upgrades may be used: (1) a Level A interactive unit, (2) a Level B interactive unit, (3) a
26 Level C interactive unit with compact disc capability, (4) a Level D digital radio tuner for
27 separate room use, and (5) a Level E information download unit. Each of these upgrades
28 is connected to the set top terminal 220 unit through the upgrade port 662 described
29 earlier.

1 Level A, B and C hardware upgrades have similar hardware components. Figure
2 12a diagrams the basic components of the Level A, B and C hardware upgrades, indicated
3 generally at 100. The figure diagrams the interaction between the hardware upgrades 100
4 and the set top terminal's 220 basic components. As seen in the figure, CATV input
5 signals are received by the set top terminal 220 using a tuner 603 and various receiver
6 components described above (but denoted generally at 601 in Figures 12a and 12b). The
7 set top terminal's microprocessor coordinates all CATV signal reception and also
8 interacts with various upstream data transmission components 604, which have been
9 described above.

10 The Level A, B and C hardware upgrades 100 each include a microprocessor 104,
11 interactive software 106, processing circuitry 108, bubble memory 112, and a long-term
12 memory device 116. In addition to these basic components, the Level B hardware
13 upgrade makes use of an additional telephone modem 120, while the Level C hardware
14 upgrade makes use of an additional CD-ROM storage device 122.

15 Along with their basic components, the Level A, B and C hardware upgrades 100
16 each use their own interactive software 106. This software may be used to provide the
17 enhanced functional capabilities described below. The Level A, B and C hardware
18 upgrades also make use of processing circuitry 108, which allows the set top terminal 220
19 to pass the subscriber's interactive input to the Level A, B and C hardware upgrades 100
20 for interpretation. These commands are passed through the interface linking the set top
21 terminal's microprocessor with the microprocessor of the Level A, B and C hardware
22 upgrades 100. In this way, subscriber inputs, entered through the set top terminal keypad
23 or remote control, can be transferred to any of the hardware upgrades for processing and
24 responses generated therein can then be sent back to the set top terminal 220 for display.
25 In the preferred embodiment the IR commands are transferred from set top terminal to
26 hardware upgrade.

27 The Level A, B and C hardware upgrades 100 also include a long-term memory
28 component or device 116 that allows each hardware upgrade to internally store data used
29 with each interactive service. Such data may include, for example, customized menu

1 templates used by the individual interactive services. In addition, the Level A, B and C
2 hardware upgrades include a bubble memory 112 for the temporary storage of, for
3 example, interactive questions and responses used in each particular interactive service.

4 The Level A interactive unit allows the subscriber to access interactive services
5 offering additional information about programs such as quizzes, geographical facts, etc.
6 This information may be received by the set top terminal 220 in several data formats,
7 including using the vertical blanking interval (VBI) or the program control information
8 signal. The Level A interactive unit enables the subscriber to engage in textual
9 interactivity with the current television program using overlay menus. Some examples
10 are quizzes, fast facts, more info, where in the world, products, etc, all of which provide
11 the subscriber with an interactive question and answer capability. Although the Level A
12 interactive capability can easily be built into the set top terminal 220, such an
13 embodiment increases the cost of the basic set top terminal 220.

14 The Level B interactive unit provides the user with access to online data base
15 services for applications such as home shopping, airline reservations, news, financial
16 services, classified advertising, home banking, and interactive teletext services. For
17 example, with this upgrade, a user will be able to reserve plane tickets or buy consumer
18 electronics. The primary feature of this upgrade unit is that it allows actual transactions
19 using two-way communications over modem with outside services. This added two-way
20 communications capability may be with the cable headend 208 or, alternatively, over
21 cellular networks, PCN or other communications media.

22 The Level C interactive unit employs a high volume local storage capacity,
23 including compact disc or other random access digital data formats (e.g., CD-ROM 122).
24 This unit allows use of interactive multi-media applications. Such applications include,
25 for example, computer games, multi-media educational software, encyclopedias, other
26 reference volumes (e.g. Shakespeare library), etc. In the preferred embodiment, many of
27 these applications will interact with live programming providing additional information
28 and interactivity to the basic program feed. For example, a viewer watching a show set
29 in a foreign country may be able to retrieve additional information, maps, economic data,

1 as well as other information about that country that are stored on the compact disc. In the
2 Level C applications, the upgrade hardware may closely monitor the television broadcast
3 through additional data channels (e.g., vertical blanking interval, or other digital data
4 encoded within live video) providing context sensitive interactivity.

5 Figure 12b diagrams the interaction between the set top terminal 220 and the
6 Level D hardware upgrade, indicated generally at 130. As shown in the figure, the CATV
7 signals are input to the set top terminal 220 through its tuner 603 and receiver
8 components 601. As described above, the microprocessor 602 coordinates all cable
9 television signal reception by the set top terminal 220. The Level D hardware upgrade
10 130 makes use of a microprocessor 132, a tuner 134, a demodulator 136, a demultiplexer
11 138, a decryptor 140 and an audio decompressor 142.

12 As shown in the figure, the set top terminal 220 and the Level D hardware
13 upgrade 130 interact through the interface linking the respective devices. The set top
14 terminal's microprocessor 602 instructs received signals to be transferred to the Level D
15 hardware upgrade 130 for further processing. These received signals are input to the
16 Level D hardware upgrade, passed through the signal path comprising the tuner 134 and
17 other digital audio reception components (i.e., demodulator 136, demultiplexer 138,
18 decryptor 140 and audio decompressor 142). Through the use of the hardware as
19 configured in Figure 12b, the subscriber can select a digital audio program for listening.
20 The subscriber can accomplish such selection through a subscriber interface (not shown),
21 which may exist at the set top terminal 220 or, alternatively, at the Level D hardware
22 upgrade.

23 The Level D hardware upgrade allows the subscriber separate access to the digital
24 radio channels while other programming (not necessarily radio) is being viewed on the
25 television. Typically, this upgrade would be used for digital radio usage in a separate
26 room from that of the television. The upgrade has a separate tuner, decompressor, and
27 visual display. In the preferred embodiment a second remote control (which is preferably
28 a scaled-down version of the set top terminal remote control, described below) is
29 provided to access the digital audio system. This remote is equipped with a display.

1 The Level E hardware upgrade allows the subscriber to download large volumes
2 of information from the operations center 202 or cable headend 208. The Level E
3 hardware upgrade will enable subscribers to download data, such as books and
4 magazines, to local storage. Primarily, the Level E hardware upgrade is an additional
5 local storage unit (e.g., hard disk, floppy, optical disk or magnetic cartridge). Preferably,
6 a small portable reader, called "EveryBook™", is also provided with the upgrade to
7 enable downloaded text to be read without the use of a TV. The portable reader is
8 equipped with a screen.

9 The downloadable information may be text or video supplied by the operations
10 center 202 or cable headend 208. With this upgrade, books may be downloaded and read
11 anywhere with the portable reader. Using this upgrade, video may be downloaded and
12 stored in compressed form for later decompression. The video would be decompressed
13 only at the time of viewing. Important text that the public desires immediate access may
14 made available through this system. Text such as the President's speech, a new law, or
15 a recent abortion decision rendered by the Supreme Court may be made immediately
16 available.

17 Using a more sophisticated port, such as the SCSI port, multiple hardware
18 upgrade units may be connected, or "daisy-chained" together, to operate simultaneously.
19 Although these upgrade units are described separately, the units may be combined or built
20 into the set top terminal 220. Those skilled in the art will recognize variations on such
21 combinations of and additions to the set top terminal hardware.

22 d. Expansion Card Slot

23 In order to provide the greatest flexibility possible and prevent a set top terminal
24 220 from becoming outdated during the terminal's useful life, additional electronic
25 expansion card slots have been built into the preferred embodiment. The expansion slots
26 665 (depicted in phantom in Figure 5b) are covered by the metal plate cover 664 as
27 shown in Figure 5b. It is anticipated that additional memory or capabilities may be
28 needed for certain customer features and also to update the system as the cable delivery
29 system's capabilities increase.

1 In addition to providing an additional memory capability, the expansion card slot
2 provides an easy method to upgrade the set top terminal hardware. In particular,
3 expansion cards can be used to internally provide any of the Level A through E hardware
4 upgrade features described above. Such embodiments, however, use the upstream data
5 transmission hardware, also described above (or built-in modem).

6 Functionally, the expansion card (not shown) may be inserted into an expansion
7 card slot 665, causing the connector on the expansion card to electrically link with a
8 connector on the set top terminal 220. Preferably, the frame of the set top terminal has
9 a shelf or rack position to hold the expansion card. The connector on the set top terminal
10 220 may simply be an electrical connection to the set top terminal's microprocessor
11 and/or memory device or devices. Alternatively, the interface between the expansion
12 card and the set top terminal 220 may be an electrical bus that allows the memory
13 resources of the set top terminal 220 to be directly expanded. In this case, the expansion
14 card itself contains a memory device or devices that expand the amount of program
15 information or data that the set top terminal 220 may access. Such memory devices
16 include RAM, ROM, EPROM or EEPROM. In addition, the interface may be a
17 "mailbox," which resides in the set top terminal 220 as a single memory location. This
18 embodiment facilitates the transfer of data between the set top terminal 220 and the
19 expansion card in either serial or parallel format. Such transfers are coordinated and
20 controlled by the set top terminal's microprocessor 602.

21 The use of expansion cards lowers the cost of the set top terminal 220 itself, while
22 also increasing its potential functionality. Thus, an expansion card may include enhanced
23 functional capabilities described as part of the upgrade module discussion above and be
24 designed to accommodate any hardware upgrade compatible with the set top terminal
25 220.

26 3. Remote Control and Subscriber Access of Set Top Terminal

27 The subscriber can access programs televised by the system through the set top
28 terminal 220 using a remote control 900. Figure 13a shows a two-section remote control

1 900 that accommodates such access. To reduce costs and make the set top terminal 220
2 as user friendly as possible, a standard television remote control 350, such as a Jerrold
3 RC 650 remote control or the like, may be augmented by adding a new section 352 that
4 provides the additional digital menu access and ordering functions. Figure 13a depicts
5 the addition of menu access and cursor movement control to the remote control 900.

6 The remote control 900 has an ordering button 354 and four-way cursor
7 movement 356 that includes a "go" button 358 and menu access buttons 360. The
8 preferred remote control 900 operates using infrared (IR) signals, with the signals being
9 received by the infrared (IR) sensor 630 on the front of the set top terminal 220.

10 In the simplest embodiment, the remote 900, may be built with only cursor
11 movement and a go button. In more sophisticated embodiments, the remote control 900
12 may be provided with buttons that are programmable to perform specific functions for
13 a series of entries. An intelligent or smart remote control 900 would increase both the
14 cost and capability of the set top terminal 220 system. Using the augmented remote
15 control 900 depicted in Figure 13a, a subscriber can navigate the program menu system
16 of the set top terminal 220.

17 Figure 13b shows an alternative and preferred embodiment of the remote control
18 900 for use in the present invention. Standard television receiver remote control switches
19 or buttons 362 may be used, including volume control, channel select, power and signal
20 source buttons, as well as other menu buttons 364, including cursor movement, cursor
21 select, menu select, and pay television buttons arranged longitudinally on the remote
22 control 900, as opposed to the width-wise separation, as shown in Figure 13a. The color
23 of the buttons or the surrounding background may differ between the standard television
24 remote control buttons 362 and the menu buttons 264 to differentiate visually between
25 these two groups of buttons.

26 The width and depth of the remote control unit 900 are considerably less than the
27 length to allow the remote control unit 900 to fit easily within a user's palm. The remote
28 control unit 900 preferably has its center of mass balanced substantially near the
29 longitudinal middle. This balance allows a user's thumb to naturally be placed in

1 substantially the middle portion of the remote control unit 900, when it is picked up by
2 a user.

3 Since the center of mass of the remote control unit 900 is placed substantially near
4 the longitudinal middle of the remote control unit 900 (thereby having a user's thumb
5 naturally fall in this same center region), the standard remote buttons 362 and menu
6 access switches or buttons 364 most frequently accessed and depressed by a user are
7 placed in the central region of the remote control unit 900 within easy reach of the user's
8 thumb. Channel and volume increment and decrement buttons 366 are placed near this
9 center of mass and longitudinal center line. The channel buttons 366 are preferably
10 beveled in opposing directions to allow a user to feel for and press a desired button
11 without looking down at remote 900. Similarly, the volume buttons 368 are preferably
12 beveled in opposing directions for the same reason. Additionally, the channel buttons
13 366 could have a surface texture different from those of the volume buttons 368 to allow
14 even easier differentiation.

15 Also placed in the longitudinal center, within easy reach of a user's thumb, are
16 cursor movement buttons 370 and a "go" button 372. The "go" button 372 selects an
17 option corresponding to the placement of the cursor. As opposed to buttons, a joystick
18 may be used with a selection on the stick, or a trackball, depressible for selecting a
19 desired choice. The cursor buttons 370 are placed ninety degrees apart, with the "go"
20 button 372 placed within the center of the cursor movement buttons 370, as shown in
21 Figure 13b. The cursor movement buttons 370 are preferably beveled inwardly toward
22 the "go" button 372 and the "go" button 372 is recessed below the level of the cursor
23 movement buttons 370 so that it is not accidentally pressed while depressing the cursor
24 movement buttons 370. In addition to the beveling on the cursor movement buttons 370,
25 these buttons may also have a surface texture to allow a user to feel for and select the
26 appropriate button without looking down at the remote 900 and directional arrows could
27 be raised or recessed on the surface of the cursor movement buttons 370 for this same
28 purpose.

1 Menu select buttons 374 are placed near buttons 370 as shown in Figure 13b.
2 Menu select buttons 374 are preferably the largest buttons on the remote control unit 900.
3 Menu select buttons 374 preferably have icons or other graphics imprinted on their top
4 surface or adjacent to corresponding buttons. For example, a button for the sports major
5 menu may contain a baseball icon. The icons represent the programming available on the
6 particular major menu selected by the menu select buttons 374. The icons may also be
7 raised above the level of the menu select buttons to provide a textured surface. This
8 textured surface would allow a user to select an appropriate menu button 374 by feel,
9 without looking at the remote control unit 900. The icons would require substantial
10 differences in texture, while still providing a meaningful graphic related to the associated
11 menu.

12 As shown in Figure 13b, labels and icons are provided for the following major
13 menus: movies, sports, children's programming, documentary/news, entertainment,
14 magazines, programming guide, HDTV (high definition television), interactive TV,
15 music, and an additional button 376 for further programming. Menu select buttons 374
16 may also be labeled A through J for the above programs, with the last button for all
17 additional major menus labeled K-Z.

18 Although the remote control unit 900 is described with a variety of channel
19 selection buttons, nearly all buttons from a standard remote control (section 362 buttons)
20 could be eliminated. The present invention would allow a subscriber to use a remote
21 control unit 900 containing only menu select buttons 374 and/or cursor movement and
22 select buttons, 370, 374, respectively.

23 As used herein, "button" is contemplated to include all manner of switches or
24 touch sensitive circuitry to activate a particular function in the remote control unit 900.
25 Additionally, although the remote control unit 900 communicates with the set top box by
26 means of infrared transmission, other forms of communication are contemplated,
27 including ultra-sound, radio frequency and other electromagnetic frequency
28 communication.

1 4. Advanced Features and Functional Capabilities

2 a. Overview

3 In the preferred embodiment, the set top terminal 220 will include features that
4 are now being adopted in the industry, including parental controls and locks, electronic
5 diagnostics and error detection, muting, on-screen volume control, sleep timer, recall of
6 last selection, etc. Each of these features has a corresponding menu (or overlay menu)
7 that allows on-screen customizing and activation of the feature.

8 The preferred set top terminal 220 also supports a number of advanced features
9 and functional capabilities. This set top terminal 220 provides subscribers with a picture-
10 on-picture capability without requiring a special television to support the capability. The
11 set top terminal 220 also supports a program catalogue service, which provides
12 subscribers with information on all programming available at its particular subscriber
13 location. The set top terminal 220 further includes the capability of querying viewers to
14 establish, among other things, favorite channel lists, personal profile data and mood
15 information. The set top terminal 220 allows the subscriber to view promotional menus
16 on future programming events.

17 The set top terminal 220 supports additional capabilities using its hardware
18 upgrades that allow subscribers to use other interactive services, for example, to engage
19 in on-line question and answer sessions, to order and confirm airline tickets, and to access
20 a variety of other data services. The set top terminal 220 makes use of a digital tuner as
21 a hardware upgrade to provide subscribers with a digital audio capability.

22 The preferred set top terminal 220 may be used to control video tape machines,
23 thereby simplifying the recording of programs. The set top terminal 220 can, in
24 conjunction with the program delivery system, easily support high definition television
25 (HDTV). For subscribers living in remote locations, the set top terminal 220
26 accommodates backyard satellite systems.

27 In addition to all the features that the set top terminal 220 supports with its current
28 internal programming and upgrade ability, additional features may be added or existing
29 features increased through remote reprogramming of the set top terminal 220. Utilizing

1 the resident operating system on the read only memory (ROM), the cable headend 208
2 is able to reprogram the random access memory (RAM) of the set top terminal 220. With
3 this capability, the cable headend 208 can remotely upgrade software on the set top
4 terminals 220.

5 Reprogramming will occur by using the program control information signal, with
6 the appropriate signals sent over this signal. In an alternative embodiment, one channel
7 is dedicated for the special programming needs. When reprogramming is to occur, the
8 cable head end will send an interruption sequence on the program control information
9 channel that informs the set top terminal 220 that reprogramming information is to
10 follow.

11 b. Picture-On-Picture Capability

12 Although the preferred embodiment of the present invention decompresses one
13 channel at a time for the viewer, users who desire a picture-on-picture capability can be
14 provided with a set top terminal 220 having upgraded hardware components that allow
15 two or more channels to be tuned and decompressed at any given time. Once two signals
16 are available, the picture-on-picture capability can be made fully available in the set top
17 terminal 220, without requiring a special television or a VCR.

18 Figure 14 diagrams one embodiment for implementing the picture-on-picture
19 capability. Such implementation necessarily requires the use of two tuners 603, 603' and
20 two decompressors 618, 618' so that two separate video programs may be displayed
21 simultaneously on the subscriber's television screen. As shown in the figure, the CATV
22 input signal is received by the set top terminal 220 and input into two separate tuners.
23 These tuners will each tune to a separate television program, both of which will be
24 simultaneously displayed on the subscriber's television. The two television programs are
25 extracted from the CATV input signal by the two parallel signals paths depicted in Figure
26 14.

27 Each signal path is substantially identical (therefore the components thereof are
28 commonly numbered, with callout numbers of the components of one path carrying the
29 prime indicator) and thus, only one path will be described. Each signal path shown

1 includes a tuner 603, a demodulator 606, a demultiplexor 609, a decryptor 600 and
2 various decompression devices. As the respective signals pass through these devices, the
3 microprocessor 602 coordinates the signal processing to produce a decrypted program
4 signal. The decrypted program signal is further partitioned between audio, on the one
5 hand, and video, graphics and text, on the other. The audio signals extracted are passed
6 to an audio decompressor 612, which further processes the audio for output to the
7 subscriber's television.

8 The embodiment diagramed in Figure 14 shows only single audio channels for
9 each video channel tuned by the individual tuners. As described above, the number of
10 audio channels will typically include four audio signals corresponding to a single video
11 channel. At least two of these audio signals may be used for stereo television play.
12 Although the subscriber can view two separate video pictures simultaneously through the
13 picture-on-picture capability, the subscriber's television can only accommodate a single
14 audio signal at a time (or two audio signals for stereo audio reception). Thus, the set top
15 terminal hardware shown in Figure 14 must also include a switch (not shown), which
16 accommodates the simple switching between each audio signal or signals that correspond
17 to one video picture or another. Such an audio switch, which is a component well known
18 in the art, allows the subscriber to listen to the audio of one picture or the other. The
19 switch may be activated by operation of the remote control 900. The video, graphics and
20 text portion of the program signal are routed through another demultiplexor 314, which,
21 in turn, separates all video, graphics and text of the signals. These signal parts are stored
22 in a memory device 620 within the set top terminal 220. This memory device may be a
23 ROM, RAM, EPROM, or EEPROM.

24 The microprocessor 602 initiates and coordinates further decompression of the
25 video, graphics and text for each of the program signals. Once these signal parts are
26 decompressed within the set top terminal 220, these components are passed to a video
27 combiner 316. The video combiner correlates and combines the video, graphics and text
28 of the two program signals. The video combiner outputs these two signals for display on
29 the subscriber's television. These signals may also pass through an NTSC encoder 625

1 to produce analog NTSC video waveforms, which may likewise be displayed on the
2 subscriber's television. Such display necessarily requires that each signal pass through
3 an RF modulator 605 in order to be input into a television. In this way, two separate RF
4 video outputs are produced. Each video signal produced by the RF modulators has its
5 own corresponding audio outputs produced by each audio decompressor.

6 Each video signal (and its corresponding audio signal) produced by the two tuner
7 configuration can be simultaneously displayed on the subscriber's television, which has
8 a picture-on-picture capability, or, alternatively, the set top terminal 220 itself can create
9 the picture-on-picture image for display. Such display involves the scaling and
10 repositioning of one or more of the video (and audio) signals so that both pictures
11 produced can be viewed simultaneously. In so doing, the subscriber's television can
12 display one of the pictures as a full screen display, with the other picture being displayed
13 as a scaled and repositioned display overlayed on the full screen display. Alternatively,
14 the pictures may be displayed in a side-by-side or split screen format. To implement such
15 a technique, the set top terminal 220 must include the hardware components necessary
16 to produce a picture-on-picture capability, including hardware capable of scaling,
17 repositioning and overlaying images. Such an advanced set top terminal 220 allows the
18 subscriber to make use of a picture-on-picture capability even though the subscriber's
19 television cannot alone produce such a result.

20 Because digital programming may be provided in a multiplexed signal, a single
21 tuner can also be used to provide picture-on-picture features. That is, the signal
22 processing equipment associated with one of the multiple tuners in the set top terminal
23 220 can demultiplex programming that has been multiplexed into a specified frequency
24 band at the operations center 204, for example. The demultiplexed programs may then
25 be scaled and repositioned for display on the television. Thus, a subscriber could view
26 four movie videos simultaneously if the movies were bundled together as they might be
27 for a premium movie service such as HBO.

c. Program Catalogue Service

Referring to Figure 15 and to Figure 8, in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, program catalogue menu 1100 listing programs available on network schedules, will be available as a major menu of the type shown as 1020. In the preferred embodiment, the major program catalogue menu 1100 would offer submenus, such as network schedules for the next seven days, today's network schedules for the next six hours, and TV program catalogue picks for the next seven days.

In order for the set top terminal 220 to provide a program catalogue service, the set top terminal 220 must receive information on all programming available at its particular subscriber location. This information will be sent to each set top terminal 220 as part of the program control information signal or STTCIS. The program control information signal would include, among other things, all programming scheduled for the next 7 days. This programming information would, for example, include the name of each program, the type of program, the program start time, the length of the program, the date the program will be shown, a brief description of the program and whether or not the program is closed-captioned, among other information.

All programming information sent to the set top terminal 220 for use with the program catalogue service will be stored in the set top terminal's internal memory. Upon selection of the program catalogue service by the subscriber, the microprocessor accesses the memory device during its menu generation and creation process. In this way, the programming information will be combined with the program catalogue menu or submenu template to produce the Program catalogue service. The program catalogue service may involve the use of more than one menu, especially where the network scheduling information covers time frames longer than a few days.

If the particular set top terminal 220 has been subscribed to the program catalogue service, the subscriber may proceed to a submenu showing schedules of programs. If the subscriber chooses the network schedule submenu 1102, he is offered a list of network schedules to choose from. If a subscriber were to choose, for instance, HBO, an HBO-

1 specific submenu (not shown) would appear and allow a subscriber to choose a date of
2 interest to see what programs are available on that particular date.

3 d. Querying Viewer

4 To support a variety of services, the set top terminal 220 is capable of querying
5 the viewer and recording viewer responses. For example, in order for the set top terminal
6 220 to establish a favorite channel list as shown at 1100 in Figure 16a depicting the
7 broadcast TV menu 1112, menus querying the subscriber and allowing the subscriber to
8 input his selection of eight favorite channels is displayed.

9 After querying the subscriber for a list of popular shows the terminal displays a
10 submenu allowing the subscriber to choose one of the subscriber's favorite or popular
11 shows for viewing. Although various embodiments of menus are possible, the goals of
12 each are the same -- to eliminate or augment printed guides to television programs. In
13 an alternative embodiment, a program viewing suggestion feature is available as an
14 additional feature. This feature gives the indecisive or lazy viewer suggestions as to
15 which programs the viewer should watch. The set top terminal 220 uses a matching
16 algorithm to accomplish this program suggestion feature. This program suggestion
17 feature is described in detail in co-pending patent application Serial No. 08/160,281, U.S.
18 Patent No. 5,798,785, entitled, REPROGRAMMABLE TERMINAL FOR
19 SUGGESTING PROGRAMS OFFERED ON A TELEVISION PROGRAM DELIVERY
20 SYSTEM, incorporated herein by reference.

21 In order for the set top terminal 220 to make decisions on which programs the
22 subscriber should watch, the terminal must create a personal profile for the particular
23 viewer. From the data in the particular viewer's personal profile and the television
24 program information available in the program control information signal, the set top
25 terminal 220 is able to select a group of programs which the particular viewer is most
26 likely to watch.

27 In order for this feature to operate, a personal profile for each viewer can be
28 gathered by the set top terminal 220 and stored in a memory file. The personal profile
29 consists of demographic information that may be gathered in a number of ways. The set

1 top terminal 220 builds the personal profile for each viewer and stores the information
2 in a memory file by viewer name. To build a personal profile in the preferred system, the
3 viewer answers a series of questions presented on a series of menu screens. These
4 personal profile screens request the viewer to input information such as name, sex, age,
5 place of birth, place of lower school education, employment type, level of education,
6 amount of television program viewing per week, and the number of shows in particular
7 categories that the viewer watches in a given week such as, sports, movies,
8 documentaries, sitcoms, etc. Any demographic information which will assist the set top
9 terminal 220 in targeting advertisements to the viewer or suggesting programs may be
10 used.

11 Once a personal profile has been created (in a particular set top terminal 220), it
12 can be indefinitely stored in nonvolatile memory. A selection at the home menu screen
13 1010 (Figure 8) activates the program selection feature. Following activation of the
14 feature, the set top terminal 220 will present the viewer with a series of brief questions
15 to determine the viewer's mood at that particular time, as shown in Figure 16b. For
16 example, the first mood question screen 1114 may ask the viewer to select whether the
17 viewer desires a short (30 minute), medium (30-60 minute), or long (60 plus minute)
18 program selection. The second mood question screen 1116 requests the viewer to select
19 between a serious program, a thoughtful program, or a light program, as shown in Figure
20 16c. And the third mood question screen 1118 requests whether the user desires a
21 passive program or an active program, as shown in Figure 16d. The viewer makes a
22 selection in each question menu, utilizing the cursor movement keys and "go" button on
23 the remote control unit 900.

24 After the viewer has responded to the mood question menus which determine his
25 mood, the set top terminal 220 uses the personal profile information and mood
26 information to find the best programming matches for the viewer. The set top terminal
27 220 displays an offering of several suggested programs to the viewer. With this program
28 selection feature, the set top terminal 220 can intelligently assist the specific viewer in
29 selecting a television program.

1 The personal profile information may also be used in targeting advertisements.
2 In the preferred embodiment, the network controller 214 can target specific
3 advertisements to individual cable distribution network nodes or, alternatively, to
4 individual subscribers. In order to accomplish the advertisement targeting capability, the
5 network controller 214 transmits packages of advertisements to the cable distribution
6 network nodes or subscribers for eventual display on the set top terminal 220. When the
7 video that the subscriber is watching nears a break for a commercial, a specific
8 advertisement or set of advertisements is specifically targeted to a particular set top
9 terminal 220 based on the personal profile information described above. Although the
10 network controller 214 is the component in the program delivery system which provides
11 this targeting capability, the set top terminal 220 accommodates transparent channel
12 switches to display the targeted advertisement. In this way, although the subscriber
13 thinks that the set top terminal 220 is tuned to a specific channel, an advertisement from
14 another channel is displayed on the subscriber's television.

15 The hardware required to accommodate such transparent channel switching
16 capabilities are shown in Figures 17a and 17b. Figure 17a shows the set top terminal
17 hardware components which accommodate channel switching within a single 6 MHZ
18 channel bandwidth. These components include a tuner 603, a demodulator 606, a
19 demultiplexer 609, a multiplexer 400, a decompressor 622, a microprocessor 602, and
20 local memory M. The tuner 603 operates by tuning to a specific 6 MHZ bandwidth
21 which includes the displayed video and a number of channels carrying advertisements.
22 The demodulator 606 processes these signals and sends them to the demultiplexor 609,
23 which converts the received signal into separate program and advertisement signals.
24 During this processing, the microprocessor 602 coordinates the demultiplexing of the
25 programming signals. Once the video signal pauses for a commercial break, the
26 microprocessor 602 instructs the multiplexer 400 to select the advertisement or
27 advertisements for decompression and subsequent display on the subscriber's television.
28 This hardware configuration allows the set top terminal 220 to switch between channels

1 within the 6 MHZ bandwidth and display various advertisements for viewing, regardless
2 of the video currently being watched by the subscriber.

3 Where a targeted advertisement falls outside the tuned 6 MHZ bandwidth
4 containing the video that the subscriber is currently watching, the hardware configuration
5 shown in Figure 17b is used. In this configuration, the microprocessor 602 instructs the
6 tuner 603 to retune to another 6 MHZ channel bandwidth, as represented by bi-directional
7 arrow A.

8 Working together, the microprocessor 602 and tuner 603 allow targeted
9 advertisements, which have been transmitted in another 6 MHZ bandwidth, to be tuned
10 with minimal acquisition time and delay. In particular, this configuration allows the set
11 top terminal 220 to tune outside a given 6 MHZ bandwidth (to another 6 MHZ
12 bandwidth) in order to select a targeted advertisement for display. This alternative
13 embodiment may require the use of a full screen mask in order to minimize any annoying
14 screen rolling during the tuning process. The masking is intended to cover any glitches
15 which would otherwise be displayed during the acquisition time (e.g., 0.5 seconds) for
16 retuning to another 6 MHZ channel bandwidth.

17 Where the acquisition time or delay becomes unreasonable, an alternative
18 embodiment (not depicted) can include the use of two tuners similar to the configuration
19 used above for the picture-on-picture capability. This alternative configuration using two
20 tuners trades an increased cost for lower acquisition times. Those skilled in the art will
21 recognize a number of other configurations of set top terminal hardware that will
22 accommodate a transparent channel switching feature. A more detailed description of
23 target advertising and channel switching is provided in patent application Serial No.
24 08/160,280, U.S. Patent No. 5,600,364, entitled, NETWORK CONTROLLER FOR
25 CABLE TELEVISION DELIVERY SYSTEM, incorporated herein by reference.

26 e. Promotional Menus

27 Figure 18 depicts the use of a promotional menu 1120 used to sell subscriptions
28 to services in the system 200. This promotional menu is tailored to Level B interactive
29 services which include a variety of on-line type services such as Prodigy, Yellow Pages,

1 Airline Reservations, etc. A similar menu is used for Level A interactive services that
 2 offers subscribers additional information about programs such as quizzes, geographical
 3 facts, etc. Such information may be received by the set top terminal 220 in several data
 4 formats, including in the vertical blanking interval (VBI) and in the program control
 5 information signal.

6 Other promotion menus similar to menu 1120 may be used for the Level C
 7 interactive services. The Level C interactive services utilize local storage such as CD
 8 technology (e.g., 122) to offer an enormous range of multi-media experiences. The Level
 9 C interactive services require a hardware upgrade as described earlier. Specially adopted
 10 CD-I and CD-ROM 122 units are used for this service.

11 Typically, promotional menus may be generated when a subscriber selects a
 12 nonexistent channel, creating a virtual channel. Such virtual channels do not require any
 13 additional bandwidth since these channels do not carry any of the data required to create
 14 a promotional menu. Instead, when the subscriber selects a channel that does not exist
 15 (e.g., Channel 166), a virtual channel is created using data sent to the set top terminal in
 16 a number of ways. For example, the data may be sent in the vertical blanking interval
 17 (VBI) of another channel, out-of-band, or with the menu information sent from the
 18 headend 208 in the set top terminal control information stream (STTCIS). The data will
 19 be used to create graphics stored locally at the set top terminal 220 as an NTSC video
 20 signal which may be displayed on the subscriber's television. In this way, a promotional
 21 menu may be drawn and a virtual channel is created. This capability simply provides the
 22 set top terminal 220 with the ability to display a promotional menu or graphics display
 23 whenever a nonexistent channel is selected by the subscriber.

24 f. Other Interactive Services

25 Figures 19a and 19b show menus (1130 and 1132, respectively) that are available
 26 using the interactive Level A services. Referring to Figure 19a, when interactive Levels
 27 A services are available for a television program, the system will display an interactive
 28 logo 1134 consisting of the letter "I" and two arrows with semicircular tails. In the
 29 preferred embodiment, the set top terminal 220 will place the interactive logo on the

1 television screen as an overlay menu. In the preferred embodiment, the set top terminal
2 220 will detect that there is data or information available about a television program
3 which can be displayed to a subscriber using the interactive service. When the set top
4 terminal 220 senses that there is interactive information available, it will generate the
5 interactive logo overlay menu 1134 and place it on the television screen. For example,
6 the set top terminal 220 will detect that information on a television program is being sent
7 in the vertical blanking interval (VBI) and generate an interactive logo overlay menu
8 1134 which will appear on the subscriber's television screen for approximately fifteen
9 seconds during each ten minute interval of programming. Similarly, the set top terminal
10 220 can sense that the programming has closed caption information available and place
11 a closed caption logo on the screen.

12 Referring to Figure 19b, when the subscriber sees the interactive logo 1134 on the
13 television screen, the subscriber is made aware of the fact that interactive services are
14 available in conjunction with his television program. If the subscriber presses the
15 interactive remote control button, another overlay menu 1133 will be generated by the set
16 top terminal 220 and placed on the screen. This overlay menu 1133 is shown in Figure
17 19b being overlayed on an interactive television program. From this menu 1133, the
18 subscriber may select a variety of different types of textual interactivity with the current
19 television program, as at 1134, including quizzes, fast facts, more info, where in the
20 world, products, etc. At any time during the interactive submenus, the user may return
21 to the television program without interactive features.

22 Another submenu 1136 gives additional information related to the television
23 program to the viewer in textual form in the lower half of the screen. In Figure 19b, the
24 submenu 1136 shows the available interactive options for the subcategory "quiz." In this
25 interactive subcategory, the user is presented with questions and a series of possible
26 answers. If the subscriber desires, the subscriber selects one of the answers to the quiz
27 question. After the selection, the set top terminal 220 sequences to another menu. The
28 set top terminal 220 sequences to the interactive quiz answers submenu which informs

1 the subscriber whether the correct answer was or was not chosen. Subsequently, another
2 submenu would show correctly or incorrectly answered quiz question.

3 Figure 20a is an example of a submenu for Level B interactive services. From
4 this menu screen 1141, any of a number of on-line data services could be accessed. One
5 service, the airline reservations selection 1142, has been chosen by the subscriber on this
6 menu.

7 In selecting airline reservations, the subscriber encounters a sequence of menus
8 as for any on-line data service. Referring to Figure 20b, the subscriber is typically shown
9 a submenu, such as submenu 1144, for the data service offering various options. In each
10 of these submenus related to a data service, the subscriber is able to exit, returning to the
11 home menu 1010 or regular cable TV.

12 Figure 20b, the airline information and reservation submenu 1144, allows a
13 subscriber to view six available flights. A subscriber may select one of the flights to
14 check on its availability. Another similar submenu allows a subscriber to enter the
15 month, day and year for the availability date desired. In this submenu, the subscriber is
16 offered the option of correcting any errors in the entered information.

17 Figure 20c is another airline submenu 1150 that allows a subscriber to view
18 remaining seats available on a flight, enabling the selection of a seat assignment. This
19 interactive submenu 1150 is an example of how information may be graphically shown
20 to a subscriber using a portion of the menu and different coloring schemes. In this
21 interactive menu, the lower half of the screen 1152 shows the passenger compartment of
22 an airplane with all the seat locations graphically represented by square blocks. By
23 coloring the available seat locations in blue and the unavailable seat locations in a
24 different color, the menu can present a great deal of information in a limited amount of
25 space. This graphic presentation of information for the interactive on-line data services
26 is an important method of visually displaying large amounts of information to the
27 subscriber.

28 Referring to Figure 20d, another submenu 1156 allows the subscriber to choose
29 a one-way or round-trip ticket, to confirm reservations and to charge an airline ticket by

1 credit card, choosing the appropriate strip menu on the lower part of the screen. In this
2 particular menu 1156, the subscriber is charging a round-trip plane ticket on a credit card.
3 The subscriber simply needs to enter the credit card number, expiration date, and credit
4 card type to charge an airline ticket. Other submenus may process the subscriber's credit
5 card charge for the airline ticket, confirm the subscriber's airline ticket purchase, and pass
6 this information to the location where the ticket is printed.

7 Using the methods and hardware described, a variety of interactive services are
8 possible. Those skilled in the art will recognize that such interactive services may be
9 accommodated by the preferred set top terminal 220.

10 g. Caller ID

11 Using the capability of the set top terminal and a connected modem, the set top
12 terminal is able to perform the function of caller ID. The caller ID function of the set top
13 terminal assists the viewer in a manner similar to the caller ID function provided by
14 telephone companies. However, the set top terminal is able to use the television as its
15 display means to communicate to the viewer information about incoming telephone calls.
16 Also, the strong local processing capability of the set top terminal allows the caller ID
17 function to be much more user friendly and convenient

18 If the set top terminal senses that a viewer is using the system and watching
19 television, then the caller ID feature would automatically be activated. When the caller
20 ID function is active, the set top terminal software will monitor incoming telephone calls
21 to the viewer through the modem. After the set top terminal senses that the phone is
22 ringing, signals are received on the tip and ring lines of the telephone, the system will
23 immediately look for incoming telephone data identifying the telephone number from
24 which the telephone call was initiated.

25 Upon receiving the telephone number from which the call was initiated, the
26 preferred embodiment of the caller ID compares the telephone number with a list of
27 telephone numbers stored in memory. The list of telephone numbers stored in memory
28 is cross referenced to a list of names, other textual data or graphics. When the set top
29 terminal finds a match between the telephone number and a number stored in memory,

1 the corresponding text or graphics are displayed on the television screen. For example,
2 "GRANDMA" and a "smiley face" graphic can be flashed across the television screen
3 using an overlay menu.

4 In this manner the viewer may see the name (and identifying icon graphics) of the
5 person placing the call and can decide whether to activate an automatic telephone
6 message recording system or answer the telephone call. After generating an overlay
7 menu, the set top terminal software awaits an IR command signifying a viewer response.
8 With the simple depression of a button on the remote control, the viewer can instruct the
9 set top terminal to send an activation signal to the automatic telephone message system
10 (through a set top terminal port). Thus, the viewer can continue to watch a program and
11 know the identity of a caller without taking his or her eyes off the television. If a dumb
12 telephone message system is used, the viewer can simply allow the telephone to ring the
13 requisite number of rings until the telephone answering machine normally activates and
14 answers the call.

15 In an alternative embodiment, having no stored telephone numbers, the set top
16 terminal may just flash the incoming telephone number on the screen using an overlay
17 menu. In a more sophisticated embodiment, a microphone is provided in the set top
18 terminal or remote control unit. Using the television's speakers, a remote control, and a
19 microphone, the viewer is able to answer the telephone using the keys of the remote
20 control without taking his or her eyes off the television screen.

21 h. Digital Audio Capability

22 Referring to Figure 21, the digital audio feature of the invention allows a
23 subscriber to listen to CD quality audio selections through the subscriber's stereo (not
24 shown). This can be accomplished by running cables directly from the set top terminal
25 220 (which may include a Level D hardware upgrade) to the subscriber's amplifier/stereo
26 system. Alternatively, the subscriber may listen to audio selections through the
27 subscriber's television system.

28 In the preferred embodiment, the digital audio feature uses a Level D hardware
29 upgrade as a digital radio tuner. This Level D hardware upgrade enables a subscriber to

1 use the program delivery system's digital audio signaling capability. Digital audio
2 transmissions require much less bandwidth than that used for the transmission of a digital
3 video signals. Thus, hundreds of digital audio programs are delivered to each set top
4 terminal 220 in limited segments of bandwidth.

5 Where digital audio programs are delivered to the set top terminal 220, the Level
6 D upgrade (shown in Figure 12b) provides the subscriber with the means to select a given
7 digital audio program for listening.

8 The Level D hardware upgrade makes use of a tuner 603 that is separate from the
9 tuner 603 used by the set top terminal 220 for video display. The digital audio signal is
10 received at the set top terminal 220 over the CATV transmission media. The set top
11 terminal 220, in turn, routes the digital audio signal to the components of the Level D
12 hardware upgrade. These components may include: a tuner 603, demodulator 606,
13 demultiplexer 609, decryptor, decompressor 622, remote control interface and
14 microprocessor 602.

15 The Level D hardware upgrade will use its tuner 603 to tune to the specific digital
16 audio program selected by the subscriber and subsequently demodulate, demultiplex and
17 decrypt the digital audio signal. Upon completion of this processing, the digital audio
18 signal will be decompressed to produce a processed digital audio signal ready to be
19 output to the subscriber's stereo or directly to speakers.

20 The Level D hardware upgrade includes ports for the digital audio signal output,
21 which provide the necessary connections for transmission of the signal from the Level
22 D hardware upgrade to the subscriber's stereo. In addition, the Level D hardware
23 upgrade include a small LED display that can show the channel number of the program
24 selected, date and time, among other display fields.

25 The Level D hardware upgrade can be physically located in a different room from
26 that of the television and set top terminal 220. Thus, the Level D hardware upgrade will
27 have its own remote control device (not shown), albeit with less available options and
28 keys than the set top terminal's remote control 900 described above. This Level D
29 hardware upgrade remote control is more limited than the set top terminal's remote

1 control 900 since the Level D remote control will be used exclusively for digital audio
2 program selection. This limited remote control, nevertheless, includes a small LED or
3 LCD display that is used to display the channel number of the digital audio program
4 selected. Alternatively, the set top terminal's remote control may be programmed for use
5 with the Level D hardware upgrade so that an additional remote control is not required
6 to use the digital audio feature.

7 Using either remote control embodiment, the subscriber accesses the Level D
8 hardware upgrade to select a digital audio program. The remote control sends an IR
9 command signal to the Level D hardware upgrade, instructing the unit's microprocessor
10 602 to initiate the selection of a given program. The desired program is processed (i.e.,
11 tuned, demultiplexed, decrypted and decompressed) as described above and transmitted
12 to the subscriber's stereo for listening.

13 The selection of a digital audio program does not necessarily require interaction
14 with the subscriber's television. Instead, all communications required to select a digital
15 audio program may occur between a remote control and the Level D hardware upgrade.
16 As a result, the subscriber's television need not be turned on for the digital audio
17 capability to operate.

18 Alternatively, the Level D hardware upgrade can be co-located with the set top
19 terminal 220 and the subscriber can select a digital audio program through a menu
20 displayed on the subscriber's television. In this embodiment, the subscriber would use
21 the set top terminal remote control to access a digital audio program selection menu.

22 In an alternative embodiment, the set top terminal 220 includes all the features of
23 the Level D upgrade and, therefore, no upgrade is necessary. Those skilled in the art will
24 recognize other alternatives that allow digital audio reception.

25 Figure 21 is a major menu 1160 displaying the digital audio program choices
26 which are available for subscribers who have paid the monthly fee. In a chart format
27 1162, the major menu shows the top five, ten, and forty songs available in six different
28 categories of music. Below the chart, the system is able to provide a text message 1164
29 describing the particulars of the audio program selected. Using the same logos and menu

1 format, the system can provide a text description enticing the subscriber to pay the
2 monthly fee and join the service. For example, one menu may allow the user to test the
3 system with a free demonstration. Another menu allows the subscriber to request
4 additional promotional information about the system. Such menus may be used
5 throughout the menu system.

6 From any of the menu screens for the digital audio feature, the subscriber may
7 return to regular cable TV with the press of a single button.

8 i. VCR Control

9 Referring to Figure 22, the advanced system of the set top terminal 220 is used
10 to control video tape machines and simplify recording programs using a Guide Record
11 feature. The set top terminal 220 has a separate output 650 for a VCR. Control signals
12 are transmitted through the VCR output of the set top terminal 220 and input to the VCR
13 to allow the VCR to be automatically controlled by the set top terminal 220. Using the
14 set top terminal 220, certain programs are selected by a subscriber from menus, and the
15 VCR will be automatically activated to record the selected program.

16 In order to accommodate the VCR control feature, the set top terminal 220 sends
17 instructions or control signals to the VCR. Such control signals are initiated by the set
18 top terminal's microprocessor 602 and passed to the VCR either using a separate
19 connection or as part of the video signals processed for display on the subscriber's
20 television. These control signals are sent directly from the advanced set top terminal 220
21 to the VCR, instructing the VCR when to begin and end taping of a particular program.

22 The microprocessor 602 coordinates the dissemination of control signals sent to
23 the VCR, storing the content of such signals in local memory. Upon nearing the time for
24 the program to be displayed, the microprocessor 602 activates the menu generation
25 software to display a notification menu or screen, notifying the subscriber that the
26 program is nearing the time for display. This reminder will also request the subscriber
27 to check whether a tape has been inserted into the VCR itself.

28 The subscriber can initiate the VCR control feature by accessing a VCR control
29 submenu, which requests whether the subscriber wishes to record a program selected for

1 future viewing. In this way the subscriber interactively enters such information on the
2 menu screen or display using any of the hardware described above that accommodates
3 subscriber interactive response capabilities.

4 In the preferred embodiment, the subscriber will use a movie library in
5 conjunction with his VCR or other video taping machinery. The movie library is a menu
6 selectable list of available movies. In that way, a subscriber may tape movies which are
7 shown at inconvenient start times for later viewing. By enabling the proper features of
8 the set top terminal 220, a subscriber can have the terminal activate the television and the
9 VCR and perform all the functions necessary to tape a movie.

10 After the VCR control feature is initiated, a menu screen confirms the movie
11 selection, start date and start time and informs the subscriber that the VCR will be
12 automatically turned on. During this submenu, the user may return to the movie library
13 major menu, or regular TV or cancel the movie library order by pressing the escape
14 button. This menu shows that the subscriber has chosen to return to regular TV. The
15 subscriber's VCR or other video taping equipment must be connected to the set top
16 terminal 220 for the automatic taping feature to operate.

17 Following a program choice, a program description submenu is placed on the
18 television screen. In addition, from this program description submenu, the viewer may
19 choose to record the selected program on his VCR using the guide record feature. If the
20 guide record feature is chosen, the guide record submenu 1170 shown in Figure 22
21 provides the subscriber with further instructions. In order for the set top terminal 220 to
22 perform the guide record functions and operate the VCR, control signals are sent from
23 the set top terminal 220 to the VCR via the video connection 650 or through a separate
24 connection between the set top terminal 220 and the VCR. The VCR is capable of
25 interpreting these control signals from the set top terminal 220 and performing the desired
26 function (such as, activating the record feature). In the preferred embodiment, the VCR
27 control signals are sent with the video signal and output from the output 650, as described
28 above. Alternatively, a separate connection between the set top terminal 220 and VCR
29 may be used.

j. HDTV Capability

The set top terminal 220 and program delivery system of the preferred embodiment can easily support high definition television (HDTV). The combination of digital video, compression and no restricted bandwidth limitation per channel makes the preferred system ideal for HDTV. The greater information flow of HDTV causes no problems for the system. The menu selection system of the preferred embodiment is a user friendly manner of presenting HDTV programming to the subscriber.

Figure 23 shows the integration of HDTV services into the menu-driven program delivery system. If the subscriber selects the major menu for HDTV 1032, the subscriber will receive either a description of the service with a suggestion to order the system, or a text note that the subscription is current and a listing of the currently available program selections in HDTV. If the subscriber has not paid to join the particular service, HDTV, the subscriber may be allowed to join one of the programs in progress for a limited time as a demo to entice the subscriber to order.

If a subscriber has paid the HDTV fees, the subscriber proceeds as in any other major menu screen. This particular major menu shows an example of how a follow-on or second screen may exist for the same menu. In this particular case, a second screen exists for the major menu HDTV 1032. The subscriber may access the second screen by selecting the last menu display block 1172 "Other HDTV Selections" in the lower part of the screen. Following this selection, the subscriber will be given a second screen of program selections. In this manner, any menu can have multiple screens with many program choices. This type of screen pagination on one menu allows the operations center 202 packager to avoid categorizing program selections within that same menu. In an alternative embodiment, the options available to the subscriber may be scrolled on one menu screen with the text within the menu display blocks changing as the subscriber scrolls up or scrolls down. Many variations of this HDTV example can be used with the described system.

k. Backyard System

In an alternative configuration, in areas without cable services where subscribers use backyard satellite systems (TV RO) to receive packaged television services, the set top terminal 220 will include the appropriate hardware to allow connection to the satellite 206 reception equipment through port 656. In this configuration, the menu system within the set top terminal 220 will be programmed directly from the operations center 202. Additionally, an upstream communication mechanism must be in place at the subscriber's home (i.e. modem) to communicate information to the operations center.

The hardware components that allow the set top terminal 220 to operate in a backyard system typically will not be included within the set top terminal shell itself. Instead, any such components accommodating the set top terminal's interoperability with a backyard program delivery system will typically reside outside the subscriber's home. As a result, the set top terminal 220 will operate as described above, notwithstanding any change in program delivery transmission media.

The terms and descriptions used herein are set forth by way of illustration only and are not meant as limitations. Those skilled in the art will recognize that numerous variations are possible within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the following claims.